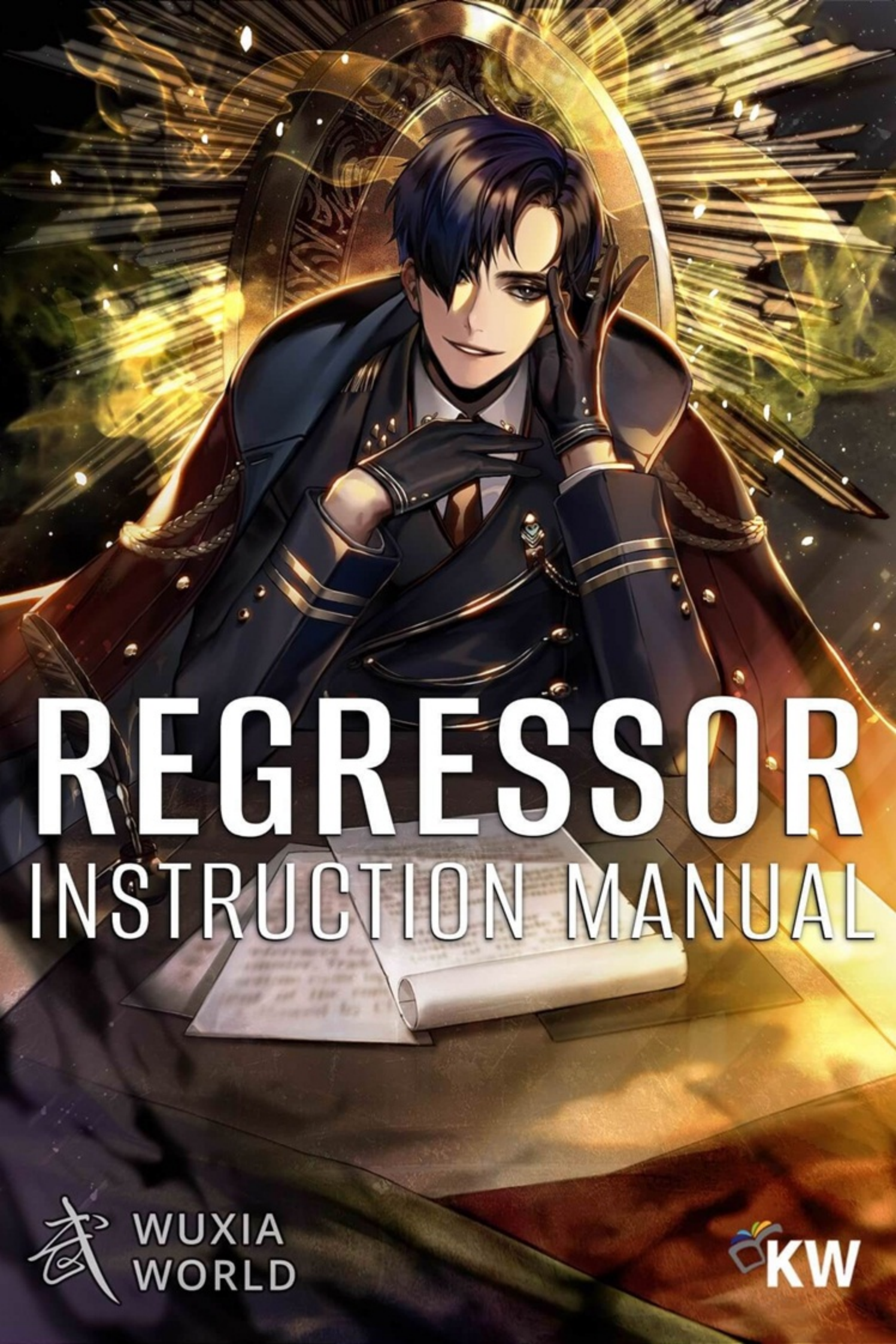
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
KW

REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

- VOLUME 1 -

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[WUXIAWORLD]

– STORY –

One day, I was summoned to this world.

Beasts poured out, and an incredible crisis came.

My talents couldn't have been worse.
[The player's talent level is at rock bottom.] [Almost all the numbers are hopeless.]

Whether you have to become a warrior or a wizard.

Whether you've gone back in time.

You have to take advantage of everything in order to survive.

"What about it?"

"I'll use everything I have to survive!"

– GENRE –

Action Adventure Comedy Fantasy Harem Mature Psychological Seinen

Lee Kiyoung

Kim Hyunsung

Jung Hayan

Lee Jihye

Cha Hee-ra

Benigore's Goddess

CHAPTER 1
MY STATS ARE BELOW AVERAGE (1)

[The tutorial will begin.]

“What the…”

Just as I was going to swear, I looked around and saw the interiors of a dark building. I saw unknown patterns through the faint light. The interior was completely different from the buildings that were on Earth. My mouth naturally widened because of the things I’d never seen before. While I’ve never seen the inside of a pyramid before, it probably looked like this.

I rolled my eyes because of the extremely unrealistic situation I was in. The last thing I remembered doing was eating with my little sister.

‘What in the world happened… ’

This was what I remember. I had received an unknown text through my phone.

- Will you participate in the game? -

I had pressed the button without thinking because I thought it was a game invitation from a friend. That was it. That was all I remember.

My chin and legs began trembling because I couldn’t understand this situation. I was suddenly at a place I had never seen before; it was only natural that I was confused.

The atmosphere here was eerie. Maybe it was because the surroundings were similar to a scene from a horror movie, but all the people here were terrified.

Before I could start thinking of anything else, I heard many whispers around me.

“Wh, what is this place?”

“Don’t ask me. I, I don’t know either.”

“I… is there anyone else here? What is this place… and why are there swords and weapons here?”

“Would we be standing here like this if we knew? Everyone seems to be in the same situation as us. Do you remember anything?”

“Excuse me! Is anyone there? Excuse me!”

Everyone started talking and acting in their own way. A person was even sitting on the floor and another was pinching their cheeks to see if they were dreaming.

‘It’s not a dream.’

It wasn’t a dream and I am not alone here. Nothing felt out of place; everything felt real.

Just as I gulped, the small cave echoed with the system’s voice.

[Players, you have been invited to this world. We sent out invitations and the players accepted. You have all been chosen as warriors in order to save the dying Continent.]

“Damn it! We’re not warriors!”

“Stop joking around and come out, you jerks!”

“I, I’m going to call the police. I, I’m going to call the police.”

“Are you doing a hidden camera prank? You can get sued. Sued!”

[However, not everyone can go to the Continent. Only a handful of people that survived the tutorial are qualified to go.]

“What the hell are you talking about?!”

[Please pay attention to what I am about to say. It is directly tied to your survival.]

When I heard the word ‘survival’ within this strange room, I suddenly came back to my senses.

[I will say it once more. Only a handful of people that survived the tutorial are qualified to go to the Continent.]

“What… are you saying that you’re going to kill us or something?”

[That’s all up to you. What I am about to tell you is related to your survival. They are going to be necessary elements moving forward. This is not a dream. This is the reality that you’re facing. I do not recommend being in denial. As the guide of this tutorial, my job is to help all of you.]

“Stop playing around! Damn it!”

“P, please let me out. Please!”

I heard many voices, but the woman continued to calmly explain.

[I will begin the guide. Number one, you are all standing at the starting point that has been created for the purpose of waiting before the tutorial starts. You can think of this place as a waiting room. At the starting point, you will find essential items you will need - water, food and the weapons you will be using from now on. The weapons are ranked as such - average, rare, epic, legendary. The weapons here are below average.]

A few items caught my attention. In the corner of the room, there was a canteen made out of leather and not a plastic bottle like the ones frequently seen on Earth.

But that wasn’t the only thing that caught my attention… The strange weapons drew my attention the most. Bow and arrow, sword and shield, spear and mace - they were all weapons often used in the Middle Ages and the way they were lined up was strange and unfamiliar.

It’s real.

They weren’t fake. A majority of the weapons were either chipped or old, but they looked sharp.

The reality of my predicament started to sink in.

[With these weapons, you will be able to protect yourselves. For your information, the goal of the tutorial is survival and attack. Besides you, the residents of the Continent are also here; they are called monsters. They will target you and you will have to fight against them.]

It was like a fantasy novel.

The funny thing was that people started screaming less and less as they focused on the voice that resounded through this place. But there were a few that started retching.

[Your strength will probably not be enough to fight against them. But please do not worry. This is not the only thing that has been prepared for you."]

"What in the world is going on…"

[You are all chosen players. You arrived here from different places with different characteristics. This place maximizes those characteristics and helps you grow. If you say 'status window,' you will understand what I am saying.]

I didn't say the phrase 'status window.' I thought it would be best to move cautiously in an unknown situation like this.

Fortunately, at that moment, someone mumbled.

"Status window."

"Status window? Oh? What's this?"

"Kyah!"

I saw a woman screaming towards the sky and people looking at something invisible with surprised looks.

[The status window is an indicator that displays your condition. Based on your efforts, your stats will either go up or down. Next is your job. Generally, they are classified into warriors, wizards, priests and archers and depending on your achievements, the jobs will be divided even further. For example, a warrior can

become a savage warrior and then they can become a berserker. There are many different ways to grow and the direction of your growth solely depends on your decision.]

“Oh…”

[The job’s ranks are average, rare, epic and legendary. For wizards and priests, they must have an affinity for either holy power or magic. Please understand that you won’t be able to choose some of the jobs. When you have assigned missions, hidden quests or experience, you will be able to select your job.]

‘A job.’

The more I listened, the more it sounded similar to a story I’ve heard. It was similar to an online game. I guess priests and wizards were rare here too.

If there really were monsters and those monsters targeted this place, then the majority of the people here would probably avoid becoming warriors. I’m sure no one would be willing to fight for others.

I immediately spoke.

“Status window.”

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 25]

[Tendency - Cautious Strategist]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stats]

[Strength - 10]

[Agility - 11]

[Stamina - 11]

[Intelligence - 19]

[Endurance - 12]

[Luck - 21]

[Magic - 00]

[Gear - None]

The screen that suddenly appeared in front of me was unfamiliar.

It felt like I was in a game and just as I quietly opened my mouth, I heard the woman's voice again.

[The last thing is the attribute. Whenever you reach a certain level, an attribute will open up. Each player has different attributes and just like the jobs, it'll be based on the player's individual characteristics. The player's unique characteristic is the most important. Like jobs, the ranks are average, rare, epic and legendary and the higher you go, the better.]

"Uh…"

[Attributes also open up in a similar way as your jobs. Attributes also have a big effect in your growth direction, so please pay attention to the choices.]

I couldn't focus on the last part because I saw shining letters at the bottom of the status window.

[Attribute - Epic Rank - Do you want to read it?]

'Huh?'

The words 'Epic Rank' shone in purple.

The ranks of the attributes were average, rare, epic and legendary. She also mentioned that depending on the player's characteristics, the attribute might only be revealed later.

'Great.'

I wasn't sure how I started out with this or whether the current situation was real, but it wasn't bad.

[Attribute]

[Mind's Eye - Epic]

[Allows you to read yours and other people's status window and hidden talent rank.]

I wasn't sure if it was good or bad, but obtaining something from the start was a big advantage.

The woman said that survival was the goal.

'Survival.'

I needed to survive. Whether the current situation was fake or real, I would try my best.

'What about Yul-Ha… '

When I recalled my younger sister being alone at home, I bit my lips hard.

Everyone had different reactions. Those that obtained attributes were discussing it

with others and some of the men were either fiddling with their swords or looking for shields. I wasn't sure what was going on, but it seemed like they were looking for ways to survive since danger was nigh. There was a woman crying on the floor, a middle-aged man that was continuously yelling, and even a child that looked like a student.

I wanted to drop to the floor and yell too, but I didn't have the time to do that.

'Talent?'

I wasn't really sure what it was, but I thought that it wouldn't hurt to take a look. After all, obtaining an attribute was already a big achievement and it meant that I would have a different start over the others. I had a strange expectation that maybe I would become the main character in a situation that only happened in shonens or fantasy novels, but I immediately shook my head.

That's impossible.'

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's Talent Stats]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Strength - Below average growth limit]

[Agility - Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - Below average growth limit]

[Luck - Above epic growth limit]

[Overall Review - Your talent level is at its lowest. Working hard will not work. No matter how hard you work, it will be difficult for you to get out of the third-rate level. Almost all the stats are abysmal. Not only are you physically challenged, but it will also be difficult for you to develop your magic stats. Your intelligence and luck are

fine, but… I'm worried about your future. You don't need to wield a sword or try something else. The results are predetermined anyways.]

I did not expect my talent to be the best, but it was really different from my expectations.

I rubbed my eyes, but the result remained unchanging.

"Huh?"

Survival was the final goal.

I didn't think that I was going to be the main character and since reality was different from comics, I couldn't help but gasp after seeing my depressing stats.

"Damn it…"

My talent stats were below average.

CHAPTER 2
MY STATS ARE BELOW AVERAGE (2)

“Damn it…”

[The tutorial has finished. The starting point will open soon. Please be careful of the monster’s attack.]

“Damn it…”

It was chaotic.

Before I could be disappointed in myself about my stats, one thing led to another and I heard the sound of unknown beasts from outside the starting point.

I began to see terrified people moving towards the walls while others geared up as if they were determined to at least protect themselves. It was the same for me.

There were enough weapons so I immediately ran and grabbed a spear. Although there were enough swords, I didn’t want to see the monster’s face up close.

‘What should I do?’

‘What should I do?’

I had a lot on my mind.

Obviously enough, I wasn’t the only one panicking. Shouts that were more like screams rang out from all over the place as the combination of the monsters’ cries and being trapped in an enclosed space instilled fear into the hearts of everyone.
“Please save us!”

“P-Please let us out. Please…”

“Stop joking around and open the door! I’m going to sue all of you! I’m going to sue! Hurry up and open the door!”

“*Sob sob*… please save us. Please…”

“I’m going to call the police! The police!”

“Grab a weapon! Don’t you hear the noise that’s coming from outside? Get a weapon!”

“You! Grab a weapon! You do it! Everyone, quickly grab a shield. Hurry!”

“What are you doing? Stop making things weird and end this sick joke!”

“It’s not a joke! Didn’t you all see the status window? Hurry up and grab a weapon! Hey mister! Do you think this is a joke?”

The large man that had been shouting desperately grabbed a wooden shield. He wasn’t the only one that suggested fighting, but he was a little more aggressive than the others.

Before I triggered anything, I saw the large man’s general information.

[Checking Player Park Deok-Gu’s status window and talent stats.]

[Name - Park Deok-Gu]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 23]

[Nature - A simple, ignorant and ardent person]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stats]

[Strength - 21/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 16/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 21/Above epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 10/Below rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 30/Above epic growth limit]

[Luck - 11/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 00/Above average growth limit]

[Overall Review - Overall, the stats are balanced. The player's strength and endurance are high, so growing into a warrior won't be a bad idea. Their endurance and stamina stats are amazing. Having low magic and agility stats are a flaw, but it can be made up with other stats, right? Compared to Lee Ki-Young, the player has great potential.]

'You didn't have to tell me that… '

Park Deok-Gu didn't look 23-years-old. He looked heavy, tall, and bulky, yet he didn't look like he was fat. It actually seemed like his entire body was covered with muscles.

Unlike me who's strength and endurance points were 10, his strength was 20 and his endurance was 30. I soon realized that my talent and basic stats were the worst.

Just like what was displayed through the Mind's Eye, it seemed like he would be useful as a warrior and meatshield.

If I pretended to be friendly now, he'd surely be wary of me. I should wield a spear first and stand near him. Sure enough, when I showed that I was going to fight with a spear, Park Deok-Gu spoke as if he was happy to see me.

"Are you going to fight too, dude?"

"Yes. I think that's the best thing to do. There seems to be something outside… it's best to do something rather than to stand idle."

"Dude, you look like a timid person but you speak my language. "

“Thank you. Let’s get ready.”

He had a satisfied look; it seemed like he didn’t realize he had said something rude. A simple conversation like this was effective.

I spoke up again, this time, towards the group. “Nothing will change if you keep denying this situation. Shouldn’t we first handle the issue that we’re about to face? The beasts are roaring outside. Whether this is reality, a hidden camera prank, or a dream, we need to do something. Everyone, grab a weapon. We must fight back.”

“Stop joking around!”

“It’s not a joke. I don’t want to joke around like this either and I rather wish that this was a joke. Everyone, please grab a weapon. If it’s a joke, then we can deal with it then.”

There needed to be a lot of people who could fight since we didn’t know how many and what type of monsters were outside.

Someone mumbled.

“O-Okay, let’s grab a weapon. T-Taking care of those things first and then assessing the situation would be best. W-We were told that we could win, s-so I’m sure we will.”

“Y-You’re right!”

“Let’s fight!”

Of course, no one was used to fighting but people started grabbing weapons. Some did it because others were doing it and others did it in order to protect themselves.

The atmosphere was getting better.

‘Not bad.’

This mood wasn’t bad.

“You guys should grab a weapon too.”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m not telling you to fight but we don’t know what will happen so you should at least have a weapon. You can’t expect someone to protect you. This is reality.”

“Oh. O-Okay…”

I’m sure they understood what I said. They looked unsatisfied as they grabbed a weapon, but that was it.

Of course, there were still a few distasteful people who were lingering in the back, but I couldn’t say that openly in a place like this. I gulped and waited for the approaching enemies.

‘Can we win?’

Of course, it was impossible, but we could probably survive through it.

A lot of us might die, but this base must be of grave importance. We must protect it.

‘Tutorial. She definitely said this was a tutorial.’

The mood felt good and everyone seemed willing to fight. Their eyes were filled with the desire to live…

‘We can do it.’

[The starting point will open momentarily. Five, four, three, two, one.]

[The starting point will now open. I wish you all the best.]

But it was my mistake to think that we could do something—that we could win—that if we endured, a miracle would happen.

“Kyahhhh!”

It wasn't the stone gate in front of us that opened, it was the one behind us. As soon as it opened, a human-like monster appeared and viciously bit off the head of a retreating woman to the point that her blood splattered on everyone around her.

Before the others could feel terrified, however, monsters rushed in from all directions.

"Ahhhhh! Save me!"

"Run!"

'Damn it!'

In an instant, the base was filled with screams.

It was hell.

Park Deok-Gu was the one who first shouted that we should fight, but he most likely never imagined, even in his wildest dreams, that we would fight against these kinds of monsters because he was staring absent-mindedly at the fight unfolding before him with his sword and shield.

We were ordinary people that never once wielded a sword and to make things worse, we weren't used to fighting. There was no way we would be able to endure a situation like this. No one could believe the reality that was in front of them.

Without realizing it, I shouted towards Park Deok-Gu, who was staring at the fight in a daze.

"What are you doing? Do you want to die?!"

"D-Dude!"

My legs and hand that was holding the spear were shaking but I bit my lips and threw the spear. Luckily, the spear pierced through a monster's head.

Park Deok-Gu aggressively pushed back the monsters with his shield.

The formation was destroyed in an instant as allies and monsters became indistinguishable from one another. There were even some that started running to

an open space.

'I need to run.'

Staying here meant that I would die.

'Die.'

A definite annihilation.

'I'm going to die.'

I had no time to waste thinking about anything else.

"Run!"

"Huh? Huh? Huh?"

"You damn pig! Run! Can't you hear me?!"

I yelled towards the man that I've been eyeing. He must've returned to his senses because he immediately raised his shield and started running away. I also threw myself through the narrow gap in order to escape.

'Oh!'

While moving, I remembered the provisions.

They were relatively close by.

I needed to grab those since I didn't know if there were other shelters aside from this base.

"D-Dude! Where?!"

"Grab the water!"

"O-Okay!"

Amidst the cacophony of voices, I could clearly distinguish the screams.

I made eye contact with a woman whose shoulder was bitten by a zombie.

“S-Save…”

“Damn it.”

I contemplated for a moment but my hands that were holding the spear betrayed the woman’s hope. The woman’s eyes were filled with despair but I didn’t look at her. After grabbing three leather bags that were sitting on the floor, I looked behind and saw how the monster rushed to the woman and attacked her.

I lived thanks to her, so it was only right to express my gratitude.

‘I’m sorry.’

After muttering an apology that I would never hear an answer to, I immediately walked away.

“Dude!”

When I turned my attention to where Park Deok-Gu was yelling from, I saw a monster charging towards me.

“Sh…”

Stab!

“Screech!”

A sword flew from somewhere and landed on the monster’s head. I wasn’t sure if it was related to my luck stats, but I considered myself lucky at this moment.

I thought I made eye contact with the man that threw the sword, but I didn’t have the luxury to check his stats. One thing I was sure of, however,was that I felt something strange.

‘What is it?’

That man didn’t seem terrified nor was he trembling in fear. He seemed desperate, but it wasn’t an obsession with life.

'Was I seeing things?'

He had a very memorable face.

When I suddenly passed him, I saw Park Deok-Gu waiting for me while holding his shield.

"Did you grab the water?!"

I didn't hear his answer but seeing the leather pouch in his right hand, it seemed like he did grab it. He was good at doing what he was told.

"I-I think there's still someone inside!"

"Shut up and run if you don't want to die! You damn pig! Don't you see the monsters?"

"Ah! Okay, d-dude!"

It only took a moment for us to escape to an open area.

I saw people getting caught while running and those that hadn't been able to escape in the first place. When I looked back, I didn't see any monsters following us. They were focused on the prey that was inside the base.

The people inside must've been resisting because I heard screams from all over the place, but I covered my eyes and pretended not to hear anything.

"S-Save me!"

"Fight baaaack!"

"Screech!"

"Kyahhhh!"

"Please save me. *Sob sob*… save me. *Sob*…"

"Ahhhhh!"

Seeing how Park Deok-Gu closed his eyes tightly, I guess he couldn't get the people we left out of his head either.

"Don't feel guilty. We had no choice."

"B-But…"

"There was nothing we could do. There was nothing we could do…"

There was nothing we could do in that situation.

I'm sure he knew this as well.

"Damn it…"

But there wasn't a way to stop the curses that were coming out of Park Deok-Gu's mouth.

CHAPTER 3
ADAPTABILITY

“W-What should we do now, dude?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Would we be standing here like this if I knew?” I answered.

I was still in shock about what just happened.

When I answered him angrily, Park Deok-Gu started walking on eggshells around me.

After the incident at the starting point, I continued talking to him casually but seeing how Park Deok-Gu didn’t say anything about it, I guess he didn’t mind.

“Since we don’t know exactly what this place is, we should first look around,” I suggested.

“A-Are you going to go outside?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Not right now,” I answered.

“T-Then are you saying that you’re going to go outside eventually?” he asked again.

“I said not right now,” I answered.

We barely managed to find a hiding place within the maze-like interior. It was a bit cramped, but it wasn’t bad since we were safe here at the very least.

‘Water, food, and weapons.’

I didn’t know when the end was going to be, but we could endure it. The problem was how long and whether this place was really safe.

I had a lot on my mind.

“I didn’t think something like this would actually happen…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“You saw the status window and those monsters. They’re neither holograms nor from a game. It’s definitely reality… I wish all of this was a dream too.”

“Ugh…”

The situation we were in was definitely real. Even though we weren’t talking about what happened at the starting point, we actually saw people dying and encountered monsters we couldn’t describe with words. Denying reality wasn’t going to change anything.

“D-Didn’t she say that the goal of this tutorial was survival or something? T-That strange lady d-definitely said that… then, i-if we continue hiding here…” Park Deok-Gu didn’t finish his sentence.

“It’s not as simple as you think,” I said, interrupting him.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“The problem is that we don’t know how long this situation will last. We managed to obtain food and water, but it’ll be difficult to last a week with this… and there’s no guarantee that this place is safe. This place might even be the shelter for the monsters,” I explained to him.

“Really?”

“I’m just saying that it’s a possibility, and even if we finish the tutorial now… how are we going to survive afterward?” I asked Park Deok-Gu.

“Wh-What do you mean?”

“I’m not certain about this, but when the tutorial ends, we’ll be going to a place called the Continent. That means that we might get into a situation where the dungeon we’re currently in may feel like heaven. There’s no guarantee that the place we’ll be heading next is going to be safer than here. Simply enduring this isn’t everything…” I explained to him.

He remained silent because what I said was true. Of course, no one knew what was going to happen in the future. But as the woman mentioned, if we really were the players that were chosen to save the Continent, this wouldn’t be the end.

We may encounter the same monsters as before, and there may be a time when we need to fight people instead of monsters. We could also encounter something worse than these in the future.

“Whether we stay or leave this place, we’ll get attacked either way,” I told him.

“Then, d-do you have something in mind?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We need to fight.”

“With those monsters?”

“Have you played video games before?” I asked, ignoring his question.

“I-Is there a person that has never played video games before?” he asked back.

“Status window, stat, title, gear, job. Haven’t you seen these words before? Think about it as if we’re currently in a game. What should we do?” I asked, hoping he would figure it out.

“I don’t…”

“It’s leveling up. We need to get stronger so that we can at least protect ourselves. If we move and kill monsters, our stats will increase, and like that woman mentioned, we can even get jobs. Our attributes will open up and it may be difficult, but when that time comes, we’ll no longer have to avoid those monsters,” I answered, cutting him off.

“Oh…” Park Deok-Gu could only squeeze out this reply.

“When we escaped earlier, we managed to obtain a sword and a shield. Not only that, but we also have food and water… We’re in a better situation than the others,” I explained.

“B-But…”

As expected, Park Deok-Gu wasn’t happy about going outside. Honestly, everyone was probably the same. There wasn’t a person alive who would want to encounter man-eating monsters.

However, we had no choice. Falling behind meant death and being eaten alive.

“Let’s think about leveling up too,” I suggested.

“Is there a way?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“If there isn’t one, we have to make one,” I answered.

If there wasn’t one, then we had to make one. No, the answer was simple.

“We can kill them,” I told Park Deok-Gu.

“How can we win against man-eating monsters…” he questioned.

If you think about it, we have a chance.

I had no clear memories of my first encounter with the monsters. Back then, the monsters swarmed us and everyone had been scared out of their wits. However, the sensation still lingered in my hands. The goosebumps I got when I stabbed my spear into them. I hadn’t even put a lot of strength into it, but my spear had easily penetrated the monster’s skin.

At that moment, I was filled with fear. I panicked in that situation because I’ve never seen those monsters before and I lost my will to fight. Next to me, Park Deok-Gu and the others felt the same way.

‘We can defeat them.’

But if we think about it objectively, we should be able to win.

“We need to think simple. As simple as possible,” I suggested.

“What are you talking about?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“What I’m saying is that we need to look at them as-is instead of getting scared of them. Of course, it won’t be easy. I don’t even know what to do right now since my body is still trembling. Both you and I. But as long as we don’t suddenly get surrounded or get raided, we have a chance. Their skins are thin, and they lack stamina. When we were running away, none of them chased after us. They left while we were running. The reason why so many people died at the starting point was

because there were so many of them. And we couldn't deal with them properly because everyone was terrified," I explained in detail.

Until I saw it with my own eyes, I couldn't be certain about anything. However, I believed that my assumptions were correct.

Compared to a human's physical capabilities, those monsters only had their jaw strength and claws as their advantages. We may have the upper hand when comparing physical capabilities. Unlike the monsters that charged in bare, we had spears and swords. It wasn't an exaggeration to say that we had the advantage in everything.

"If we think objectively, we can win," I told him.

The problem was that Park Deok-Gu was easily scared. After my spiel, he gulped anxiously.

'How frustrating.'

Just then.

"Screech."

I heard a voice from somewhere. I naturally took a deep breath and Park Deok-Gu, who was next to me, did the same.

"Screech!"

I wasn't sure if it traveled alone or if it got separated from the group. However, I could hear it.

"Is this really where they live?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

'Shit… can we really do it?' I asked myself.

We would inevitably encounter them at least once.

It felt like someone was squeezing my heart, but I bit my lips hard. If we left this place, then our efforts would've been for nothing.

[Checking the Gluttonous Mouth's Status Window.]

[Name - None]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 5]

[Nature - Instinct]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stats]

[Strength - 11]

[Agility - 15]

[Stamina - 14]

[Endurance - 12]

[Luck - 10]

[Magic - 00]

I was able to see the monster's information through the narrow gap.

'It works.'

I can use this ability against monsters too. This was slightly good news.

'We can win.'

We needed to overcome our fears.

I couldn't see it clearly before, but it definitely looked horrendous. Its entire body was bare, but its green eyes, jaws, and teeth that were sticking out were unpleasant to look at. The moment when a monster used the same jaw and teeth to bite the neck of the woman whose name I didn't even know continuously replayed in my head.

'But.'

Their stats were terrible. I couldn't say that we had good stats, but the monster's stats were worse than I imagined. With their stats, defeating them was possible. I tightened my grip around my spear for no reason.

Park Deok-Gu looked at me nervously, but he wasn't thinking about backing out. Still, I needed to show him that we could win.

"I-I thought we can't go out?" he asked nervously.

"…"

I didn't bother answering. It was because my back was covered in sweat and my hands and legs were trembling.

'Damn it… '

A single mistake meant death. We would most likely die, but we had to do something. We would definitely encounter them sooner or later, I simply had no idea when.

"We'll die even if we don't go outside," I told him.

I took a deep breath and immediately went out.

"Screech!"

'Damn it!'

I knew that the monster would notice me once I got close to it, but it noticed me sooner than I anticipated.

It was natural for me to think that I needed to swing my spear while moving. However, my hands didn't move the way I wanted. My body froze in fear.

“Ahhh!”

As I screamed with all my might, I had no choice but to attack its head with my spear as it approached me. It must’ve realized that I was attacking because the monster immediately ducked. Changing the rotation of the spear wasn’t easy. I put strength into my trembling hands and when I lowered my spear, it happened to pierce into its shoulder.

“Screech!”

Stab!

I almost let go because of the hair-raising feedback from its flesh, but I didn’t have the time to space out.

“Ahh!”

When I pushed my spear into a wall, the monster got stuck on the wall. I unknowingly frowned as I watched it struggle, but I grabbed a rock that was next to it and started beating its head with it. The monster’s claws injured me, but I didn’t feel any pain.

“Damn it! Damn it! Damn it!”

Crack!

I got goosebumps when the monster’s strange mucus and blood landed on my hands and body. Yet, I couldn’t stop beating its head.

“Damn it!”

Crack!

“Die!”

Crack!

“Screech…”

Crack!

“Whew…” I started panting.

I was able to put the large rock down after the monster’s face was completely destroyed.

“Whew… whew…” I continued panting.

My heart was beating fast and it wouldn’t calm down. I wasn’t sure if it was the monster’s saliva or blood, but my arm was covered in the mysterious liquid.

This was my first time killing a living being.

My eyes met Park Deok-Gu’s as he narrowed his eyes with chattering teeth. He looked surprised. He probably thought that I wouldn’t be able to do it. I also couldn’t believe what I had done.

[Strength increased by one point.]

My assumption was correct. When the corner of my lips went up, Park Deok-Gu spoke cautiously.

“Hey, what’s your name?” he asked.

“Lee Ki-Young,” I answered.

“Would it be okay if I called you hyung-nim?” he asked cautiously.

I gave a slight nod instead of answering.

As he looked at me with a strange gaze, I looked straight into his eyes and continued talking.

“If I can do it, you can do it too. No, you can do better than me,” I encouraged him.

“I think I understand what you’re saying. Hyung-nim, leave it to me. What should I do now?” Park Deok-Gu asked confidently.

I think I picked a decent guy. We had a lot of things to do, so I spoke while looking at him.

“First, let’s get a job,” I suggested.

Getting a job was our first task.

CHAPTER 4
REGRESSOR (1)

“Let’s get a job first,” I suggested.

Finding a job was the first step.

“How do we get a job?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I don’t know,” I said.

Park Deok-Gu looked at me with a bewildered look.

“I’m not someone who knows it all, and I’m not that smart either,” I told him.

“You’re pretty smart, hyung-nim. You look like a teacher, but you seem more reliable than a knowledgeable teacher,” he complimented me.

He was partially correct. The problem was that I was never good at studying.

“Then how do we get a job?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We don’t have a choice but to hunt those monsters. That woman explained that our jobs would be determined based on our efforts,” I answered him.

“I-I think I heard that too…” he commented.

“We have to do something if we want things to change. We either need to keep training with our swords or continue fighting those monsters for a chance at getting a job. If we stay here, we’ll end up dying before we even get the chance to try anything,” I explained.

As I spoke, I poured out all the items that were inside the leather bag. Park Deok-Gu looked at me as if he was questioning my action, but when I weaved my shoelace into the leather and wrapped it around his body, he must’ve noticed something because he looked a bit touched.

“It looks like armor… don’t you need one hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I didn’t need one since he was the one who would be fighting in front. A veil to cover my neck was all I needed. It wasn’t like I would be going out there to make a fuss. However, there wasn’t a need to explain that to him.

“You have a bigger frame than I do,” I answered.

“I’m afraid that I won’t meet your expectations, but I’ll do my best one step at a time,” Park Deok-Gu said.

I nodded in agreement.

* * *

Park Deok-Gu met my expectations.

To be honest, I knew he would be strong after I saw his basic stats. I didn’t understand how stats affected our bodies, but still, his stats were double compared to mine. I was particularly surprised by his endurance - 30 points.

He had his shield, sword, and strength, which came from his large frame. With the shabby leather armor, he looked like a gladiator in a movie.

My expectations for him were naturally high, and I was sure that he was going to leave a good impression on me. But after he gained some confidence, he greatly exceeded my expectations.

“Hyung-nim!” he called out to me.

“Got it,” I answered.

I saw his back as he was pushing back two monsters with his shield. While he must still be terrified because he looked pale, the monsters that got hit with his shield didn’t seem to feel the same way.

Park Deok-Gu was using his pure brute strength to push one of them back and while being pushed into a wall, the only thing the monsters could do was to attack with their claws. When I threw my spear through the narrow gap between them, I felt something strange as the spear pierced into the monster’s face.

'Bullseye.'

"Ha!"

Park Deok-Gu also swung his sword as the monster released a bizarre scream. Even though he frowned, he tightened his grip around his sword because he knew from experience that if he let his guard down, he could get hurt.

"Screeech…"

After the monster's body became lifeless, I pierced my spear into the monster's face one more time.

"Pant… pant…"

'I'm tired.'

It looked easy, but nothing about it was easy. My job was easier compared to Park Deok-Gu's job, but there was a difference between our stamina. We only spent a few minutes dealing with the monsters, but my entire body was already covered in sweat.

"Here, have some water," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Thanks," I said.

When I released a light sigh, Park Deok-Gu asked worriedly.

"Why do I feel like you're too weak?"

"It's because I've never exercised before," I answered.

My stamina point did increase though.

'By one point.'

Park Deok-Gu was a bit different. He originally started with 30 points, and he now has 33 points. Compared to me, he had a great result. I wasn't sure if our talent affected our stat growth, but it must be the case.

The rank of his endurance stat was above epic and if he wanted, he had the potential to reach above legendary, so growing this fast wouldn't be considered as pushing his limits.

'Damn it.'

Every jealousy had a reason.

What I was worried about was being no longer needed by Park Deok-Gu, but looking at his innocent-looking face, it didn't seem like that was what he was thinking. Even so, he needed to rely on me so that I could have an advantage in surviving this place.

"Hyung-nim, how about we go a bit farther today? " Park Deok-Gu suggested.

"Let's look around some more… and lower your voice when you're talking," I told him.

"Do we still need to be cautious?" he asked.

"What do you think was the reason those monsters gathered at the starting point?" I asked instead of answering.

"That female guide…" he didn't finish his sentence.

"That's a possibility, but I think there's a different reason. The monsters may be slow, but they're sensitive to sound. Since people were yelling for a long time in one area, it's not an exaggeration to say that the monsters came from different directions. If we started the tutorial quietly, I'm sure half of the group would've survived," I explained to him.

"I-Is that so?" Park Deok-Gu questioned.

"Yeah and stop going 'Heup!' and shouting so much when you're fighting. It's not that bad right now since we're only dealing with one or two monsters that have been separated from the group, but when there's a group of four or five monsters, we'll be the prey instead of the hunters," I warned him.

It was strange how he was looking at me with respect. If he thought about it more objectively, he would've realized this himself. But this innocent guy didn't think badly of me, which I found hilarious.

After nodding my head, I continued talking.

“This place around us doesn’t have that much monster foot traffic because the monsters that were originally here have gathered at the starting point. I’m sure the people that ran away during that time are in a similar situation to us right now.”

I thought it would be best to share with him the intel that I had one by one.

“Let’s eat something,” I suggested.

“Good idea,” Park Deok-Gu said in agreement.

Just as we quietly sat on the ground and took out the dry food that even a dog wouldn’t eat…

“…”

I heard a faint voice from somewhere.

I wanted to pretend that I didn’t hear it, but Park Deok-Gu asked while listening closely.

“Isn’t that a person’s voice?”

“No way.”

“Kyaaah… please save me,” someone screamed.

To make things worse, the voice was getting closer.

‘Oh… ’

They knew that we were here.

‘It was a mistake.’

Leaving sword marks on the wall so that we wouldn’t get lost was a mistake. I hoped that someone would come and find us, but I never imagined someone would approach us while screaming like a maniac.

“H-hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu called out.

“Grab your sword,” I told him.

It was too late to avoid them.

“Screech!”

Luckily, there didn’t seem to be a lot of monsters chasing the person. Having a new person join us was exciting, but at the same time, it was depressing.

‘It would be a different story if they had food and water, though… ’

Having limited resources was the problem. We weren’t philanthropists so we needed someone to fight with us, not hold us back. To join us, they must have the will to fight, food rations, and their group must also be small. The screaming person definitely did not meet these conditions. They did not deserve to travel with us.

“How annoying…” I commented.

“I don’t think we need to worry so much hyung-nim. There doesn’t seem to be a lot of them,” Park Deok-Gu said.

‘Easy for you to say.’

While holding his sword and shield, he ran out first. I immediately followed behind him while holding my spear.

When we arrived at a slightly open area, we saw a woman running with three monsters chasing after her. Half of her clothes were torn and even though she was beautiful overall, I wasn’t interested in her physical appearance.

‘Damn it.’

She must’ve seen us because the way she ran towards us was a sight to behold. She had neither weapon nor food on her.

After checking the stats of the monsters behind her, I immediately activated my eyes and looked at the woman.

[Check Jung Ha-Yan's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Innocent Supporter]

[Job - Unemployed.]

[Stats]

[Strength - 10/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 12/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 22/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below rare growth limit][Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 10/Above legendary growth limit]

[Overall Review - Jung Ha-Yan possesses above legendary growth limit. Her overall physical stats may be low, but she'll be able to grow a lot later as a mage or a priest. Currently, Jung Ha-Yan isn't aware of the fact that she is able to feel magic. Compared to this woman, it's not an exaggeration to say that player Lee Ki-Young is like the dirt that's on an ant's pincer.]

'What the hell.'

I couldn't believe the stats of the woman that was running while panting. It was my first time seeing someone with an above legendary stat rank. Unlike us, who didn't possess any magic points, she already possessed 10 points.

"We've never fought against three monsters," Park Deok-Gu said.

I could already imagine the scene of us abandoning the woman, but after checking her stats, everything changed.

"We're going to fight," I said.

"Can we even win?" Park Deok-Gu questioned.

"We'll lure them to a narrow area," I suggested.

"I understand," he said.

Fighting while leaning against a wall was more advantageous than being surrounded. The downside was that we wouldn't have an escape route, but I believed that we weren't going to lose so easily. I tightened my grip around my spear.

She must've realized where we were because she started running as fast as she could. Seeing as how she nodded her head when I waved to her to come this way, I guess she wasn't dull-witted at all.

"We'll stand by at the corner," I suggested.

"G-Got it," Park Deok-Gu stuttered.

When the woman reached us, the monsters turned around the corner, and Park Deok-Gu swung his shield with all his might.

"Now!" I yelled.

"Ha!"

The monster was pushed back for a moment, but as it charged towards Park Deok-Gu again, I attacked with my spear.

"Hyung-nim!"

When another monster grabbed my spear, my mind went blank, but thanks to Park Deok-Gu's swinging of his sword, the monster was destroyed. But as a result, he lost his posture.

As expected, dealing with three monsters wasn't easy. The only thing I could do for Park Deok-Gu, who was crouching while holding his shield, was to swing my spear.

The moment I bit my lips again, I suddenly saw a sword coming out from the monster's back.

"T-Thank you," Park Deok-Gu said.

"It's nothing," someone said.

Someone helped us. After the monster was taken out, the person standing behind it was a face that I had seen before. He was the same man that helped us back at the starting point.

I remembered his slightly desperate face.

"What the…" I whispered.

[Checking Player Kim Hyun-Sung's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Kim Hyun-Sung]

[Title - Regressor of Altanus, Swordsman that Starts the Second Round, One Who Couldn't Overcome, One Who Sacrifices, The Awakened.]

[Age - 22]

[Nature - Kind-hearted Mediator]

[Job - Swordsman-Average rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 19/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 28/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 23/Above legendary growth limit]

[Intelligence - 18/Below epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 22/Below epic growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 11/Above legendary growth limit]

'What is this… '

I couldn't help but widen my eyes at the unknown status window.

'A Regressor? Time reversal?'

From the looks of it, this didn't seem to be his first time.

CHAPTER 5
REGRESSOR (2)

I carefully read his stats again and realized that I wasn't seeing things.

[Checking Player Kim Hyun-Sung's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Kim Hyun-Sung]

[Title - Regressor of Altanus, Swordsman that Starts the Second Round, One Who Couldn't Overcome, One Who Sacrifices, The Awakened.]

[Age - 22]

[Nature - Kind-hearted Mediator]

[Job - Swordsman - Average rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 19/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 28/Above legendary growth limit]

[Stamina - 23/Above legendary growth limit]

[Intelligence - 18/Below epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 22/Below epic growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 11/Above legendary growth limit]

[Talent - Sword Expert-Epic]

[Overall Review - Amazing. It's understandable if you can't believe it even after seeing it with your own eyes. It's impossible to accurately measure Kim Hyun-Sung's potential strength, agility, and stamina. The other stats have amazing potential as well. He has an enormous amount of potential to grow as a mage, but he has better potential as a close-range warrior. Even though he has an average-ranked job, he has more opportunities to grow. Compared to Lee Ki-Young… no, comparing you to him is an insult to Kim Hyun-Sung. Consider it an honor for being able to talk to him.]

'No way… '

Even after rubbing my eyes, the Regressor title was still there.

'He really went back in time?'

Of course, I couldn't believe it. Although the monsters that had attacked us were very much real, I would still believe it if someone told me that they had pulled a hidden camera prank on me.

Swordsman that Starts the Second Round. I was so dumbfounded that I didn't know what to say. Unless my talent, Mind's Eye, was lying to me, it meant that the man in front of me had already experienced this situation once. When I thought about it, he didn't look scared when we were at the starting point.

'Damn it… '

I cursed. I knew that my world was somewhat unfair, but I didn't expect to experience that same unfairness here. High stats, high potential ability, job, and legendary attributes.

'Will I be able to read his attributes?'

The moment I thought about it, his information popped up.

[Attribute, Swordsmanship Expert]

[Additional points will be awarded for every action that uses a sword. Attack power will increase at a fixed rate in proportion to the time the sword is swinging.]

'Good.'

I didn't know the formula for calculating attack power, but I felt like obtaining definite results based on practice time was a really good attribute. I wasn't sure what kind of attributes I would see in the future, but as a swordsman, it was useful for building one's foundation.

I bit my lips because it seemed unfair, but if he really arrived here after going back in time, then I could understand how he had those legendary stats.

"You are?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"My name is Kim Hyun-Sung," he answered.

"I'm Park Deok-Gu."

"And he's?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"That's Ki-Young hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"I guess… this isn't your first time fighting," Kim Hyun-Sung commented.

"Well, as you can see. Ki-Young made this leather armor and even though we haven't fought a lot, we've gotten slightly used to hunting. He destroyed the head of a monster first using his spear and after seeing that, I gained a bit of confidence," Park Deok-Gu explained.

"Despite that… you seem pretty experienced," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Well, everything is thanks to hyung-nim here. You look more experienced than him though. Didn't you kill that monster with one shot?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I was just lucky," Kim Hyun-Sung answered. The man turned his attention to me

after hearing what Park Deok-Gu said.

'He's talking nonsense… '

It wasn't easy to act like nothing was wrong since I had all sorts of thoughts in my head. The moment our eyes met, it felt like he was looking through me. I felt like I was naked and I found it uncomfortable, but more than that, a strange feeling caused my body to tremble.

'Bloodthirstiness? Magic?'

Since I didn't know what it was, it didn't matter either way, but I felt something strange.

"What…" I didn't finish my sentence.

'Did he catch on to the fact that… I was reading this status window?'

I posed as if I was reading something and I obviously looked out of place.

On Kim Hyun-Sung's status window, kind-hearted was what was shown under nature, but it didn't mean that he was just a good-natured person.

He returned to the past for a reason and even though it was only a slight possibility, if he believed that we were enemies, he might swing his sword at us without hesitation. No, I must not be suspicious in his eyes. I couldn't let anything untoward happen.

Just then, Park Deok-Gu spoke while quietly chuckling. "Hyung-nim, can you stop looking at your status window? Did you get a job or something?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

'Nice, Park Deok-Gu.'

"It's similar to that but I'll tell you later," I told him.

I felt like I haven't calmed down yet. Rather than talking to Kim Hyun-Sung first, I decided to walk towards the woman named Park Ha-Yan.

She must've been surprised because while catching her breath, she eventually

looked up at me and then spoke, “Thank you.”

“It’s nothing. We were in the middle of finding survivors anyways,” I explained to her.

“I see…” she said quietly.

“I’ll help you stand up,” I offered to her.

“Oh, it’s okay. I don’t want to cause any more trouble…” Park Ha-Yan didn’t finish her sentence.

She was already at her limit. When I quietly offered her my hand, she grabbed it as if she had no choice.

Because Kim Hyun-Sung was looking towards us, I felt like I was walking on eggshells. I spoke quietly towards him. “Thank you for your help and my name is Lee Ki-Young by the way. This was our first time handling three of them at the same time… we would’ve been in trouble if it wasn’t for your help,” I said, thanking Kim Hyun-Sung.

“My name is Kim Hyun-Sung. Now that I think about it, I think I’ve seen you before,” he said.

“I remember you helping me back at the starting point. Thank you very much for helping me,” I said, thanking him again.

“Oh… right…” he said, not finishing his sentence.

“Yes. Things were so chaotic that I ended up running away…” I explained to him.

He didn’t really remember. Thinking about the situation back then, it was understandable that he couldn’t remember every detail. For some reason, I recalled the moment where the woman I couldn’t save was getting eaten by the monsters.

After shaking my head, I continued talking. “Are you by yourself? It must be hard…”

“For now… I’m currently gathering survivors. There are people traveling together,” he explained.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I’m gathering survivors. I heard a scream while passing by… let’s stick together for now. I’ve prepared a base at an appropriate location,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

I saw Park Deok-Gu quietly looking at me. The look on his face seemed to ask me as to what I was going to do.

Kim Hyun-Sung must’ve realized that he was being a bit rude because he asked Park Deok-Gu. “Oh, my apologies. Would you like to come with me?”

That was when Deok-Gu nodded his head. However, there was a need to think about it.

“How many survivors are there?” I asked.

“About 30 people,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“And how many people can fight?” I asked again.

“There aren’t that many. If you and Deok-Gu join us, we’ll be in a better situation than before. It would be great if you two could join us,” he explained.

‘I’m worried… ’

It was just as I expected. I wasn’t sure how accurate his nature was on the status window, but his nature, *kind-hearted mediator*, seemed to be the truth.

‘A pushover.’

Calling him an angel was putting it nicely and calling him a pushover was putting it badly. If screaming was the only thing that the majority of the people at his survival base could do, then the situation would only get worse. I was sure the people there weren’t eating properly and were living in constant fear.

Having a lot of people wasn’t necessarily advantageous. If five people gathered, there was at least one idiot in the group. Based on that, if 30 people gathered, I believed that the situation would only get worse.

I’m sure people were going to start talking. The group might be strong enough to deal with emergencies, but if there were too many things they had to protect, then it would make things more chaotic.

However, the reality was that I had no choice but to nod since I had a lot of questions. I wanted to know what exactly was a *regressor*. How he got a job, and how he was able to start in a different way from others. I also wanted to know how to use *magic*. Most importantly, I wanted to know the secret behind this tutorial.

Kim Hyun-Sung knew the strategy for this place and not only that, he had information about the Continent. Regardless of what happened, following him was the right thing to do.

"We'll go with you," I told him.

"Thank you for agreeing. Let's head out soon since more of those monsters will be coming here," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

"Okay," I agreed.

"Oh, you are…" Kim Hyun-Sung turned his attention towards Jung Ha-Yan.

"My name is Jung Ha-Yan. And I…"

"Oh, nice to meet you, Ms. Jung Ha-Yan. My name is Kim Hyun-Sung," he said, interrupting her.

They exchanged quick introductions.

While supporting Jung Ha-Yan, I slowly started looking at Kim Hyun-Sung's face. He looked a bit different from when he was looking at me or Park Deok-Gu. It was because he was staring at Jung Ha-Yan for a long time.

He seemed a bit surprised. A strange sense of accomplishment appeared on his face. I wasn't sure if this was the correct comparison, but it was as if he had found an oasis in a desert or he met his family that he got separated from.

Jung Ha-Yan also must've noticed the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung was staring at her because she looked at him warily. Anyone would become wary if someone stared at them for that long.

It was to the point that I asked myself, *'Was he looking for her?'* No, it was highly probable that she was the person that he was looking for.

“Are you okay?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked her.

“Yes, I’m fine,” she answered.

“If you feel uncomfortable, please let me know anytime,” he told her.

“I-I’m really okay,” she said, stuttering.

Ignoring their conversation for a moment, I was deep into my thoughts.

‘Let’s assume.’

It was a bit funny, but let’s assume.

Let’s assume that I regressed.

I didn’t know how Kim Hyun-Sung’s life ended, but it could’ve been either sad or happy. Unless he intentionally started this life over, it was possible that he had regrets in his past life.

‘One Who Couldn’t Overcome.’

This was one of his titles. Even if he didn’t acquire this title intentionally, the fact that it belonged to him remained the same.

Humans were animals that often regret. Even if it was just me, I thought about what would’ve happened if I saved the woman I saw at the starting point. If I had power, then I would have had the option to save the woman and run away with Park Deok-Gu.

What if I knew everything that was going to happen in the future and knew all the talented people who were going to play an important role?

In my case, I would try to change the things that I regretted, but of course, that wasn’t the only thing. I would strive to acquire everything so that I would have the advantage from the start, such as talented people, treasures, jobs, as well as goods.

I would also eliminate any threats and enemies that we would encounter in the future.

'Although it's funny to think about… '

In that sense, seeing as how Kim Hyun-Sung didn't really show any reaction towards me and Park Deok-Gu, it was safe to assume that we weren't going to block Kim Hyun-Sung's path in the future or become villains that would shift the balance of the world. As a result, it meant that we weren't characters with important roles. I'm certain we were one of those people that could simply be considered as passers-by.

"Will it be okay if I call you Ha-Yan?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Oh… yes. Thank you. Y-You can call me whatever name you're comfortable with," Jung Ha-Yan answered, stuttering.

But this woman that was blushing at Kim Hyun-Sung was different.

Jung Ha-Yan.

She had enormous potential as a mage or a priestess. Corroborating the information that I saw through my Mind's Eyes, I immediately understood.

'She's valuable.'

Of course, this was just an assumption. However, if I put together all the small information and use deductive reasoning, I could obtain a reasonable result. This woman was going to change the world in the future. I wasn't sure what she was going to do, but she would be in a very important position.

However, it could also be a simple delusion of my own. Jung Ha-Yan could've been Kim Hyun-Sung's lifesaver and was a comrade that he regretted not saving. She could also be like me or Park Deok-Gu who would die before doing anything.

But it was worth trying…

'This woman.'

She was no longer a burden, but a precious treasure that had fallen into our hands.

CHAPTER 6
REGRESSOR (3)

Honestly, it wasn't just Jung Ha-Yan, but Kim Hyun-Sung as well. Whatever the reason was, there was a good possibility that this strong man once saw the end of the world. He knew everything that was going to happen and he seemed to have the will to change and use that future for his own agenda.

If I were to borrow the words from a fantasy novel, he was like a chosen warrior. There wasn't a reason for me to maintain a bad relationship with him.

'Lucky bastard.'

I wasn't jealous of the burdens he carried on his back but the things that he was going to obtain and use from now on. It was a rather clear fact that he would be climbing up in the future.

I thought it would be best for us to obtain as much as we could, while we had the chance.

"How much farther do we have to go? Are you sure we're going the right way?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes, we're almost there," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

Park Deok-Gu mumbled with dissatisfaction and Kim Hyun-Sung gave a small nod to show that they could keep moving. It was strangely interesting that he was cautious while looking around. He was definitely watching out for the monsters.

His stats right now weren't that high. While it was true that he was in an advantageous position because he had attributes, a job, and magic stats, I doubt that he would be able to do anything much if monsters swarmed us from all directions.

'That's probably why he couldn't protect it.'

If that was possible, then no one would've died at the starting point.

“More than that, it seems like a lot more people survived than I expected. I thought the majority of them died…” Park Deok Gu said.

“Honestly, we could’ve saved more. I lost my composure too at first, so I had a difficult time facing them. If there were more people that could fight…” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“Well, I was in the same situation. All I did was run away… if it wasn’t for hyung-nim, I would’ve died already. Are all 30 people from the starting point?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Oh! Not really. It seemed like there was a starting point at a different location as well. The place was a bit far from where we were…” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“Ugh… I guess we weren’t the only ones that came here,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“Yes, but if we broaden our search scope, I’m sure we’ll receive good news. The search party has been finding traces of people little by little,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I wasn’t sure what he meant by good news.

“Are you thinking about finding more survivors?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I believe we definitely should if circumstances allow us to,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered confidently.

His eyes were telling the truth.

I guess it wasn’t a lie when the word, *kind-hearted*, was included in his nature. There was no way I could know the details, but it seemed like he wanted to save and survive with everyone, which made my head hurt.

‘This guy… ’

I had an idea how the survivor camp was being managed.

“You don’t look so good. I-Is something the matter?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

I must’ve looked slightly unwell because Jung Ha-Yan asked while studying my face.

“Oh, it’s nothing. I was just thinking about something…” I answered her.

“I-If you’re uncomfortable, then.”

“I’m fine,” I said, interrupting her.

“Oh… I… well…” she said nervously.

“Sorry?” I asked.

“I-I know I’m late, but… thank you for saving me,” she said.

A small smile appeared on her face as she thanked me. It was a bit uncomfortable trying to support her as we walked, but it wasn’t a problem since I believed that I had to do whatever I could in order to stay on her good side.

Jung Ha-Yan’s face strangely turned red. I guess she wasn’t used to physical contact with the opposite sex. We maintained a certain distance from each other and that helped her bring down her guard. When she continued showing her friendly smile, I was able to look at Jung Ha-Yan, who started relying on me more and more.

When we walked a bit farther, we saw a very open space.

‘Not bad.’

The space wasn’t that bad. Having one entrance wasn’t a bad thing. It seemed like they installed barricades to block the monsters that would come in through the entrance. I also couldn’t see the inside from out here.

“Amazing. How did you find this place?” Park Deok-Gu asked in amazement.

‘He probably knew about this place already.’

“I found it by accident. I found this place while the survivors and I were trying to find a decent place to settle,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“You were really lucky,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

It was possible that he used this place in his past life. This place was different from the starting point where monsters were able to come from all directions. It was a bit

crude, but having this as the base in a place like this was like having a strong castle.

It was unlikely that he actually found this place by accident when it was very far from the starting point. It was only a little bit, but I was starting to become certain that he really regressed and went back in time.

“It’s really amazing. Don’t you think so, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked me.

I nodded lightly.

“Even if 100 of those monsters come charging in, I’m sure we’ll be able to block them with a place like this,” Park Deok-Gu said excitedly.

“I don’t think so,” I said, disagreeing with him.

“I-I guess I was overexaggerating a bit,” he said.

If there were enough people, we could indeed stop them. But not having a way out apart from the one and only entrance was this base’s weakness. If the number of monsters that invade this place became unbearable, then we would definitely be annihilated. Excluding the few lucky ones, everyone would die.

I opened my mouth slowly as I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung. “All the sides are blocked. If a large number of monsters come in through the entrance…”

“That’s why we’re moving with utmost caution. We’ve also been diligently taking care of the monsters that appear nearby,” he explained, interrupting me.

“Do you go out to hunt regularly?” I asked.

“Yes. At least until we find another clue…” he answered.

I was starting to get curious as to who did the hunting. When we walked slowly to the entrance, I saw a woman coming out to greet us. She was a bit short and had a charming look.

“You’re back, Hyun-Sung oppa? Oh, you’ve brought new people,” she said, greeting him.

She flinched a bit when she looked at the large-framed Park Deok-Gu walking

towards her while holding a sword and shield. I was surprised by how she talked to us while maintaining her smile.

'She's friendly.'

"Ji-Hye," Kim Hyun-Sung called out.

"I was worried because you were getting a bit late," she explained.

[Checking Player Lee Ji-Hye's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Lee Ji-Hye]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Selfish and ambitious person]

[Job - Unemployed.]

[Stats]

[Strength - 05/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 09/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 09/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 18/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 08/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 12/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 00/Below average growth limit]

'Trash.'

I couldn't help but mumble to myself at the appearance of the trash that was more hopeless than me, but truthfully she wasn't that different from me.

[Overall Review - Congratulations, Lee Ki-Young. You've finally met your soulmate. There's a good chance that she'll be a good match for you. Not only does she have low stats, but she has bad potential. Wielding a sword or staff is not recommended. It may be different if she wants to use them to end her own life because of her horrible talent. I won't wish for you two to get together because I'll feel really bad for the baby that'll be born.]

I was about to curse, but I suppressed it. It seemed like the message that appeared on the status window was taunting me.

After quickly turning off the status window, I recalled the information about the woman. Her nature stood out more than her lousy talent and stats.

'Selfish and ambitious person.'

I guess I could say that she was similar to me.

Unlike the others that were inside, she came out to greet Kim Hyun-Sung because she was conscious of the gazes of other people. She was sucking up to Kim Hyun-Sung in order to live.

"Hehe, can I get your names?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"I'm Park Deok-Gu," he answered first.

"I'm Lee Ki-Young."

"I'm J-Jung Ha-Yan. Nice to meet you," she said.

“Nice to meet you all. I’ll first take you to where you can rest. Is that okay, Hyun-Sung oppa?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“Of course, I’ll leave it up to you, Ji-Hye,” he answered.

“Yes, just leave it to me, Hyun-Sung oppa,” she said confidently.

The way she clenched her fists looked cute, but after recalling her nature, she didn’t seem so sweet anymore. Seeing as how she was studying me, Jung Ha-Yan, and Park Deok-Gu, it seemed like she was guessing how we happened to collaborate with Kim Hyun-Sung.

Park Deok-Gu must’ve passed her assessment because he had a large frame and was holding a shield and sword. Jung Ha-Yan and I on the other hand must’ve failed because Jung Ha-Yan was limping and I looked weak, despite supporting her on my own.

The way she intentionally went to Park Deok-Gu’s side and started talking to him was a funny sight.

“Have you encountered any monsters?” Lee Ji-Hye asked Park Deok-Gu.

“Not only did we encounter them, but we killed a few already,” he answered her.

“Oh my… wasn’t it scary?” she asked again. Her slightly surprised expression was an act.

“O-Of course it was scary, but… hm. If it wasn’t for hyung-nim, I would’ve been in big trouble,” Park Deok-Gu explained.

The moment he gave her an unnecessary answer, Lee Ji-Hye looked at me again. I wasn’t sure if it was because we were similar, but I knew what she was doing right now. She was revising her evaluation of me.

I probably went from Tom, Dick, and Harry to Park Deok-Gu’s hyung-nim.

“Oh, so Ki-Young fought with you,” she said.

“Of course, we fought together! Every time he attacked with his spear, the monsters started falling one by one,” Park Deok-Gu explained.

'Shut up, you pig… '

I wanted to cover Park Deok-Gu's mouth. I thought I had shown him a slightly impressive side of me, but his affection towards me was excessive. I felt relieved because I didn't have to worry about him backstabbing me, but those actions of his caught me off guard.

"Oh, I see. That's a relief. At least the base will become a bit safer now," Lee Ji-Hye commented. She spoke as if she was looking forward to it.

However, I didn't feel happy about it after I read the expression of the survivors that looked at us as we entered. I activated Mind's Eye and checked everyone, but no one really caught my attention. But I completely understood the looks they gave us.

'Relief.'

They all looked relieved. They released sighs of relief when they saw us enter with a spear, sword, and shield.

"Sigh…"

I expected something like this to happen, but after seeing it with my own eyes, I couldn't help but sigh. This place that Kim Hyun-Sung created was a very safe place indeed. Not to us, but for them.

CHAPTER 7
JOB (1)

I wasn't a philanthropist. I was actually the opposite and was similar to Lee Ji-Hye, who was smiling like an idiot in front of me.

When we walked in with our spear and sword, a few survivors nodded at us as if they were happy to see veteran warriors join them.

'This wasn't what I wanted… '

At this rate, I'm going to end up being the meat shield.

"I said guide in order to make it sound impressive, but there isn't really much I can show you. Besides the fact that the males and females have separate rooms, there isn't much to see here," Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"We're still thankful for this," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"Thank you for your understanding. I was a bit worried…" she said.

"There's no need to worry. We're thankful that we were even invited here," he told her.

"Hehe, you're very nice. Would it be okay if I called you Deok-Gu oppa?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"Well… do as you please…" he answered.

"You're reliable," she complimented him.

The innocent Park Deok-Gu was kind of getting fooled by Lee Ji-Hye. Despite the fact that she was six years older than him, I guess he liked it when she called him *Oppa*.

"Is that alright for you, Mr. Ki-Young?" she asked me.

“I don’t care about titles, so do as you please,” I answered.

I noticed her not looking in Jung Ha-Yan’s general direction.

“Then I’ll call you Ki-Young oppa from now on. Hehe. Oh! Please come this way Ms. Ha-Yan. There aren't any particular rules about living here, but Hyun-Sung will explain the details about this place to the rest of you. As for you, Ms. Ha-Yan. I’ll be the one to explain the details to you, so you should just rest for today,” Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

“Oh… okay! M-Mr. Ki-Young, I’ll see you in a bit. Thank you for bringing me all the way here,” Jung Ha-Yan thanked me.

“Okay, I’ll see you in a bit,” I told her.

“Okay!” she responded energetically.

Jung Ha-Yan bowed her head before entering the women’s section with Lee Ji-Hye. I was sure she was being told of the various rules about this place, but I honestly wasn’t really interested in what they were doing.

I was more interested in what we should be doing moving forward.

“Hyung-nim, don’t you think this place is somewhat a good place to live?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It is, but…” I said, not finishing my sentence.

“Something wrong?” he asked curiously.

“It’s not a big problem, but,” I answered.

“But?”

“It’s nothing,” I said.

“How lame…” Park Deok-Gu commented.

I frowned a bit at the thought that I could become a meat shield that would protect this safe shelter, but after thinking about it more, I realized that it wasn’t a bad deal.

'All I need to do is get what I need.'

There were so many things I could obtain from this place. After safely hunting with Kim Hyun-Sung, I could obtain a job through the hunt, and then I would bring Jung Ha-Yan to our side. I'm sure there would be a few problems along the way, but it was none of our concern.

As expected, Kim Hyun-Sung called for both Park Deok-Gu and me the next morning.

"Did you sleep well?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"I did, thanks to you," Park Deok-Gu responded briefly.

I hadn't been able to sleep well when it was just Deok-Gu and me. Compared to when we had to take turns taking short naps, this was an amazing respite.

I had an idea about what Kim Hyun-Sung was going to talk about today so I spoke up first when I saw him hesitating a bit. "I don't see a lot of people that can fight. The majority of them are either women or injured and if not those, then they just don't have the will to fight," I said.

"Yes. Unfortunately, that's the case," Kim Hyun-Sung agreed.

"How are you maintaining this place?" I asked.

I decided to be straightforward about it since it was something I had been curious about. After staying silent for a moment, Kim Hyun-Sung slowly opened his mouth.

"Honestly, the situation isn't that great," he started.

That was what I expected. I stroked my chin as I took over.

"You don't have food and water and there aren't enough people that can fight. And yet, you have 30 children you need to look after, maybe even more. It looks like that number is going to be increasing."

"…"

“You may have been able to endure it up until now with the food and water that you obtained prior to this, but the supplies that you put together ran out faster than you thought and now it’s time for you to find a solution again. Am I right? Bringing supplies from the other starting points is impossible now. As of right now, taking care of the monsters that are in front of this building has been overwhelming, and yet, the number of deadweights that can’t fight has been steadily increasing,” I explained.

“They’re not deadweights,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Perhaps they’ll stop being deadweights later on, but they are deadweights right now,” I told him.

Kim Hyun-Sung remained quiet. It was probably because he somewhat agreed to what I said.

“To be honest, considering the current situation, I think leaving this place may not be such a bad idea,” I suggested.

“Are you going to leave hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I spoke as I shook my head.

“I’m not, but all I’m saying is that staying here won’t be beneficial for us,” I told him.

“Oh…”

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, I can’t say that Park Deok-Gu and I are amazing people. While he may be helpful, I may not be. The only thing that I did was stand by while holding my spear,” I explained to him.

“…”

“However, we can still fight together and be your strength,” I said.

“Thank you,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

He pretended like nothing was wrong, but I was sure he was having a hard time. Not only was he exhausted physically and mentally, but he was probably at his limits. I’m sure he was really glad when Park Deok-Gu and I appeared.

“I’m not a philanthropist,” I said bluntly.

“Oh…” was all Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I have a basic idea of what you’re thinking about, Mr. Hyun-Sung. I’m sure you want everyone to survive so that we can all return. I also agree and understand, but I’m different from you. I can’t sacrifice myself for other people and I don’t really think about returning with everyone. I have nothing to say if you tell me that I’m being a bit selfish but…” I explained to him.

“No, I understand. I’m sure there’s something that you want,” he told me.

He was easier to talk to than I thought. I had been worried that he would say it wasn’t right and then he would draw his sword against me. But seeing how he responded, I was rather grateful to him.

“Then I’ll tell you. First is having ownership to a portion of the supplies that we find from now on,” I started.

He nodded slightly. I guess this didn’t really matter to him.

“And…”

“…”

“We would like to take part in your future plans,” I said.

Kim Hyun-Sung’s face stiffened slightly, then looked at us with a strange expression. He looked a bit surprised, but he gradually gave a faint smile.

“I guess you knew,” he said.

“At the starting point, the strange woman gave us two choices. Attack and survive. I personally think that the latter is impossible, no, it may be possible if a few people possessed a large number of supplies. However, I don’t recall hearing exactly how long we were supposed to survive for,” I explained.

“…”

“If we run into a situation where our second task was setting a goal, then gathering

survivors isn't the best thing to do. If we don't get eaten by the monsters, we'll end up dying from starvation. Anyone can make this deduction," I told him.

Since I knew that he was a regressor, I just mixed and matched whatever deduction I could come up with. However, he seemed deeply impressed by me putting together the small pieces and coming up with a story. I could see him slightly bowing his head towards me. My assumptions were correct.

"I look forward to working with you," he said.

"Me too…" I said.

As I grabbed Kim Hyun-Sung's hand, I saw a sense of trust in his eyes.

He probably already knew that I wasn't that strong, but in Kim Hyun-Sung's head, he should have thought of me as a useful, competent person. For example, someone like a strategist or an administrator.

* * *

"Hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu called out.

"I know," I told him.

Together with Kim Hyun-Sung, the hunt for monsters became easier. Not only that, but I was starting to thoroughly believe what I had seen in the status window through the Mind's Eye.

"Deok-Gu," I called out to him.

"I'm going," he answered.

Seeing the way he wielded his sword, Deok-Gu definitely seemed familiar with it but it looked like he wanted to hide his skills because he would intentionally make mistakes sometimes. However, when one of us was in trouble, the reaction he showed didn't belong to someone that was wielding a sword for the first time.

'Good.'

While Park Deok-Gu was handling a few monsters, Kim Hyun-Sung and I took care of

the monsters in our line of sight. Since the monsters were sensitive to sound, Park Deok-Gu would hit his shield using his sword in their direction, and while he was getting aggroed, we would quickly take care of the monsters.

I guess I wasn't used to fighting because my spear was shaking. When I attacked a monster that was charging towards Park Deok-Gu, it fell with my spear stuck to it. During that time, Park Deok-Gu used his shield to hit it.

"Ha!"

"I think there's a few more coming. I'll block them for a little bit, so you two…"

"Got it. Deok-Gu, grab the supplies," I said, interrupting Kim Hyun-Sung.

"That's what I've been doing, hyung-nim. Did he take kendo or something while he was on Earth?" Park Deok-Gu asked me.

"I don't know either. Maybe he did a similar sport or maybe it's the effect of the job that he obtained," I answered.

"He sure is fierce when fighting," Park Deok-Gu commented.

Kim Hyun-Sung was using his high agility stats to dodge and attack. The movement looked easy but it was definitely not simple.

Park Deok-Gu finally knew why Kim Hyun-Sung was so far ahead of him, and it was because Kim Hyun-Sung revealed that he had a job. Park Deok-Gu seemed a bit anxious after knowing that. He was feeling stressed because he was in a situation where the job he had been waiting for seemed to never arrive.

"Ha!"

When I eventually killed the last one, Park Deok-Gu quietly nodded. He looked really surprised.

"This starting point has fewer monsters than I thought," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"I'm sure he's already cleaning up the area nearby," I said.

"Are you talking about Kim Hyun-Sung?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yeah. There’s a lot of supplies, but no survivors… no, if there was a survivor, then I’m sure all the supplies would’ve already run out,” I explained.

“I seriously didn’t think that the three of us would be able to obtain the supplies that were at the starting point,” he said.

“It’s all thanks to you,” I said, complimenting him.

“I didn’t do anything. It’s all on Kim Hyun-Sung’s,” he said.

“That’s not true. If it weren’t for you, it would’ve been difficult for us to even arrive here,” I told him.

They weren’t just empty words. We were able to come here because of Park Deok-Gu. No matter how efficient Kim Hyun-Sung was in taking down the monsters, it would be impossible for him to handle all monsters from every direction. He was still in the midst of development, and I was sure that having someone reliable to block the front lessened the burden that was on his shoulders.

Just then, I checked the status window to see if my stats increased.

“Oh? Hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu called out.

Park Deok-Gu’s voice sounded surprised and at the same time, I saw something pop out in my vision.

[A few jobs have opened. Please select the job that you think you’ll need.]

‘Great.’

It happened faster than I thought. I felt eager to clean up the area with Kim Hyun-Sung.

[Reading the available jobs.]

[Warrior - Average Rank]

[Archer - Average Rank]

[Mage - Average Rank]

[Leader - Average Rank]

I saw a job that I really wanted.

CHAPTER 8
JOB (2)

'Leader?'

While the text colors of the other jobs were white, this one was shown in blue. It probably caught my attention more because the rank was rare, but I should read the explanation of each job first.

[Warrior - Average Rank]

- A warrior is needed in a party since they're the vanguards. Although they can't be considered as effective, they're able to easily adapt to a sword and shield, a spear, or an ax. The player will be able to change to other similar jobs such as savage warrior, knight, paladin, cavalry, or mercenary. The endurance, stamina, and strength stats will increase by one point.

[Archer - Average Rank]

- The archer is capable of ranged attacks and will acquire basic knowledge of the bow and arrow. Not only can they change to similar jobs like rogue or assassin, but they can also change to spirit archer and magic archer, which are the high-ranked archer jobs. The agility stat will increase by three points.

[Mage - Average Rank]

- This is a long-ranged job that allows the player to use magic. They'll acquire basic magic knowledge and afterward, they can change their job to black mage, alchemist, or summoner. The player's magic stat will increase by three points.

All three jobs weren't that bad.

The warrior increased three of the stats that I had a difficult time increasing and for the archer, it provided basic knowledge of the bow and arrow. As someone that

preferred to stand in the back and do the easy work, the archer was a really good job for me. The mage was the same and the fact that it was going to increase my nonexistent magic stat caught my attention even more. However, I was most curious about the rare[1] leader job.

[Leader - Average Rank]

- This job barely has any combat abilities. Rather than being at the front of the battle, the leader figures out the situation and gives orders, giving them a wider field of view. There's no information about what kind of job the player will be able to change to later. The player's intelligence stat will increase by one point.

Honestly, before reading the description, my mind was already set on the leader job. However, after reading it all, my head started hurting.

The leader's ability wasn't bad, but…

'What does it mean by a wider field of view?'

And it was only going to increase my intelligence stat by one point. The other two jobs increased stats by three points, but for this job, I would be losing two points. But this wasn't the end of it.

'Later... '

It worried me that there wasn't any information about my future jobs.

Thinking about it now, the swordsman job that Kim Hyun-Sung had was also an average job. Based on his stats, I'm sure he would be able to obtain a rare or an epic job. Since he possessed swordsmanship as his attribute, I guess he was rejecting the swordsman job for now. It seemed like he was more focused on the path he knew and walking on that path rather than what was efficient right now.

While contemplating for a bit, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung walking towards me.

"Looks like the jobs opened up for you," he said.

“Yes,” I answered.

If I knew which job was good and the direction of its growth like Kim Hyun-Sung did, then it would be easier for me to choose, but since my first decision will decide everything moving forward, I couldn’t help but think about it even more.

While I was thinking about how I could get advice from Kim Hyun-Sung without being too obvious, Park Deok-Gu opened his mouth. “Hyung-nim, this…”

“What is it?” I asked.

“I’m in a dilemma. The rank of the warrior and priest are average, but the shieldbearer’s rank is rare, so I’m not sure which one I should pick,” Park Deok-Gu explained.

“A priest?” I asked.

“Well, it looks like I can change to a job that’s similar to a holy warrior later… and it looks like the warrior can change to a berserker… but isn’t rare better than average though?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

Considering how his potential stats were focused on stamina and probably endurance, shieldbearer wasn’t a bad choice at all.

“The shieldbearer…” I started.

“Well, it says that the job focuses on shielding. It says that I will get an advantage whenever I use my shield, but the problem is that there isn’t any information about the jobs later on. Also, it says that my strength will decrease by two points, but my endurance and stamina will increase by three points,” he explained.

“That doesn’t sound that bad at all,” Kim Hyun-Sung commented in my place.

Even if we didn’t ask first, he was trying to help without being too obvious.

“Your endurance stat seems high and even though the decrease in your strength may be the penalty, the fact that your endurance will increase that much more is pretty surprising. Even if your strength decreases, you will still obtain four stat points,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

'Really?'

If this was an online game, a vanguard and a tanker were necessary. After seeing his reaction, it seemed like this place had a similar system. Tankers were just as rare as priests.

"Hm… is that so?" Park Deok-Gu said.

"Have your attributes opened up?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Not yet," he answered.

"For me, I chose swordsman as my average job and as for my attribute, I possess an attribute that increases my offensive power. I wanted to choose warrior since it increases strength, but I thought choosing swordsman was better since it greatly increased the agility stat. Even to this day, I still think I made a good choice when I made that decision back then," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Oh," I said.

He was trying to discreetly express his opinion.

The job wasn't the only thing that mattered. What mattered was the stat's balance, whether one's attribute existed, and the ability of the attribute. I came to the conclusion that a job was the most effective when those three conditions were met.

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't strongly insist on it, but he was hoping that Park Deok-Gu would pick shieldbearer, the rare-ranked job. "What do you think, hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked me.

"I agree with Kim Hyun-Sung. We don't know if you'll obtain an attribute that'll increase your attack, but Mr. Hyun-Sung can make up for the lack of offense, and considering the current situation, it's definitely not bad since your stats are going to increase by four points… still, it's your choice," I explained to him.

"Hm… the priest is…" he started.

"The worst," I said, finishing his sentence.

Even if he could change his job to a holy warrior later, I felt that being a priest wasn't

the best job. Also, Park Deok-Gu's magic stat wasn't that high either.

After some time had passed, I saw Park Deok-Gu's body shining blue for a moment. He succeeded in changing his job.

"Did you pick?" I asked.

"I think shieldbearer is the best one," he answered.

"Oh yeah?" I said.

"I have no doubt that Kim Hyun-Sung will do well and I know hyung-nim will protect me in the future as well, so leaving the offensive power to someone else may not be such a bad idea. Well, if the mage job shows up later then I can show my offensive powers then, right? It's a bit scary standing at the very front, but I think I can do it," Park Deok-Gu explained.

"You made a good choice," I said, complimenting him.

Kim Hyun-Sung nodded as well.

"If you don't mind, can I ask what you chose as your job?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked me.

I remained quiet for a moment and then answered. "I haven't made my decision yet, but warrior, archer, and mage are listed as average rank. Leader is listed as rare."

"Leader…"

As Kim Hyun-Sung said it, I noticed his face flinch a bit.

'Is it a trap?'

I couldn't help but think that maybe the leader job was a trap.

"Hm… I see," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Yeah, for some reason, that job fits you very well, hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu said, complimenting me.

"R-Really?" I asked, stuttering.

“I never said it, but aren’t you the type to lead? I can just imagine you waving your hand coolly while standing in the back… yeah, I’m sure we’ll win if you lead,” he explained.

Even though Park Deok-Gu was acting excitedly when I mentioned the leader job, I couldn’t call myself a leader.

‘It’s because I don’t know any strategies.’

I had never read any strategy book before. I wasn’t good at go or chess, and I wasn’t exactly smarter than others.

The only leadership experience I had was when I became the raid leader of an online game whose name I couldn’t even remember anymore.

Honestly, my character was more like a trickster than a leader. Actually, having a rogue-like job may not be such a bad idea.

“I’m ready to receive your order, hyung-nim!” Park Deok-Gu said energetically.

‘This guy… ’

He was acting pretty cute. I guess he already assumed that I was going to pick leader for my job.

“It says that the job will widen my field of view and my intelligence will increase by one point. I’m sure you’ve seen the description for the other jobs,” I explained.

“It seems like there isn’t much you can gain. Normally, the other jobs increase one’s stats by at least three points…” Kim Hyun-Sung said. It sounded like he was trying to stop me, which made me feel like the leader job was truly a trap.

“You’re a leader hyung-nim! A leader!” Park Deok-Gu said excitedly.

I ignored Park Deok-Gu since he was the only one that was excited and decided to think about it more.

“It may look good now since the rank is rare, but I can’t help but be worried about the fact that you can’t see the jobs that you can change to later on. It’s possible that the jobs that’ll appear later on will be average-ranked jobs. Choosing your first job is

very important, so…”

“Hey, hyung-nim is a leader! A leader! Please lead me!” Park Deok-Gu yelled, interrupting Kim Hyung-Sung.

“…”

“Ki-Young, I think picking archer isn’t a bad choice either. The fact that you can use a bow is surprisingly advantageous… if you can provide support from far away, it’ll be a huge help and later, the rogue job…”

“I’m telling you, hyung-nim is a leader! A leader! Follow me!” Park Deok-Gu said, interrupting Kim Hyun-Sung again.

“Increasing the stats first… will be more beneficial,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“The leader job can really bring out hyung-nim’s strengths! He has to pick leader no matter what!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“Archer is…” Kim Hyun-Sung started.

“Leader!”

“The archer…”

“Leader!”

“Archer…”

“Leader!”

“Archer is definitely!”

“Leader!”

“Then the archer job…”

I became more confused because of how both of them were acting.

‘The… ’

If this continued, I felt like the remaining monsters around us would attack us by any moment now.

Kim Hyun-Sung seemed like he knew a bit about the leader job, but it seemed like he wanted me to pick archer so that he could help me grow. However, he didn't know that my potential stats were really bad.

'I just want to pick archer too.'

But if I picked leader, then that would be a problem too, and I couldn't forget about mage either because even though my magic stat was nonexistent, I felt like I could use my intelligence with it since it had the highest points.

'What should I do… '

The important thing to do was to choose a job that would really bring out my strengths since my Mind's Eye explained that there was no hope for me.

"Oh…" I said.

In the end, I couldn't help but choose the job that was the most efficient. I closed my eyes and as I made a decision, there was a bright light, and I felt my body changing ever so slightly.

"Whew…"

I succeeded in changing my job.

Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu spoke up at the same time.

"Did you choose leader? Or archer?"

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1. The job is average, this just means that it's a rarely-seen job ☜

CHAPTER 9
IT'S EASY TO TAINT SOMETHING INNOCENT

"Mage," I answered.

"Umm…"

"L-Leader is…"

Both of them had similar reactions. Park Deok-Gu looked really disappointed and while Kim Hyun-Sung seemed okay with my decision, he also seemed a bit disappointed.

I was more drawn to the archer that could use a bow, but agility was the foundation of an archer's strength and my agility stat was low. It'd be different if there was a possibility that my agility stat was going to increase later on, but my potential agility stat was the worst.

No, more than that, I wasn't the physically active type. It was obvious that even if I picked archer and then changed to a rogue later, I would probably contemplate on a similar issue.

Honestly, the mage job was the same. I already knew that my mage stat wasn't that high, but…

'I need to bring out my strengths.'

I thought this was the best way to put my intelligence stat to use. When thinking about the jobs I could possibly change to, later on, I was sure that I would see a job that I would be efficient in despite my low magic stat.

"Do you mind me asking why you picked that job?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

I nodded lightly and then answered. "It's just a gut feeling."

I had no choice but to pick this job. Even if I picked the leader job, I would only get

one measly stat point. But the mage job was going to give me three points to my magic stat that was basically nonexistent, so that was a huge advantage on my end.

“I see,” Kim Hyun-Sung commented.

It was as if he understood what I meant.

I felt a bit bitter because I couldn’t openly come out and say that it was hopeless because my stats were low in the first place.

[Acquiring basic knowledge of basic magic.]

[The effects of the job have increased your magic stats by three points.]

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young’s Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious strategist]

[Job - Mage]

[Job Effects - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 10/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 12/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 19/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 12/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 21/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 03/Below average growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Talent - Mind's Eye]

[Overall Review - Your stats are still hopeless, however, I applaud you for knowing the importance of getting a job. Choosing the mage job may be the best choice because, with your stats, it must've been difficult to feel magic. You must feel hopeful since your magic stat increased by three points, but I recommend not having expectations in growing as a mage. The bigger your expectations, the bigger your disappointment.]

'Why you… '

For some reason, I felt that the overall review wasn't all that bad. Even though there was criticism, I was satisfied by the fact that I obtained magic.

The information on the status window definitely changed.

I think I had an idea about what it meant when it said that I acquired basic magic because new knowledge started pouring into my head.

Since it was basic magic, it didn't look too complex, but I did understand the concept of magic, how to move magic, using mana to manifest magic, and the concepts of anthromorph and chants.

"Not bad," I commented.

It was a bit different than what I imagined.

I couldn't really describe it with words, but I felt like I solved an unknown formula or built a tower using magic. Chants and anthromorph were completely unfamiliar concepts to me, but they continued piling up in my head, which helped in building my foundation in magic.

'I think I can use it right away.'

Unlike the leader job, once I adapted to this power, I would be able to use it right away. I slowly closed my eyes and when I felt the magic move inside of me, I immediately received a reaction. Even though the magic was as big as a fingernail, I was thankful that it moved according to my will.

As I continued controlling the magic in my head, Kim Hyun-Sung spoke while looking at me. "We've slowed down too much, so let's head back for now. As for the food…"

"Two bags should be more than enough," I said, interrupting him.

"Okay."

After Park Deok-Gu grabbed two bags, I handed the rest of the bags to Kim Hyun-Sung. I guess he thought that we were being considerate because after nodding briefly, he looked at us with a slightly thankful look.

There were a total of 12 leather bags at this starting point and considering Park Deok-Gu's contribution in attracting the aggro of the monsters, we should receive more than two.

"Thank you for being considerate," Kim Hyun-Sung said, thanking me.

"There's no need to thank me since we wouldn't have been able to get these if it wasn't for your help… considering how many times you've helped us, this is only right," I explained.

"Still…"

"Just take those and feed everyone," Park Deok-Gu said, interrupting him.

"Okay, got it," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"By the way, what are you thinking about doing with the others? You can't just leave

them there like that," Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

"The people that aren't willing to fight will only hinder us and since we can't have any victims… I think it'll be a good idea to take them out to hunt monsters consecutively after they are done with their adaptive training," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"I'm not sure if that'll work," Park Deok-Gu commented.

Thinking about it now, Park Deok-Gu had also completed his adaptive training, but I didn't bother saying what was on my mind.

"I'm sure it'll be somewhat effective. As a test, I think it'll be best to take one person, but only if you two agree with it. Is that okay?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked us.

"I don't mind, but… hyung-nim, what do you think?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I don't mind either, but would it be okay if we picked the person?" I asked him.

"Is there already someone…"

"If she's willing to do it, I was thinking about taking Jung Ha-Yan," I said.

"Oh."

I saw Kim Hyun-Sung nod as if it was a good choice. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Jung Ha-Yan was a lottery ticket that had already won.

I already checked her potential stats using my Mind's Eye. There was a good chance that Kim Hyun-Sung was also curious about Jung Ha-Yan's future.

I couldn't help but laugh after seeing him express his happiness so openly.

The journey back to the shelter was pretty comfortable. In order to go to the other starting points, we needed to leave the shelter for quite a while. This was the result we reached after planning ahead. As expected, when we approached the shelter, Lee Ji-Hye and a few others ran out and greeted Kim Hyun-Sung.

"Oh, Mr. Hyun-Sung! Deok-Gu oppa and Ki-Young oppa, thank you for your hard work as well. We'll take the…"

I saw the people naturally grabbing the bags that Kim Hyun-Sung was carrying. When a man with an injured leg discreetly extended his hand out towards us, I shook off his hand and spoke.

“We’ll carry our bags.”

“Oh, okay…” was all the man said.

I was basically telling him that we would be taking care of our supplies. Funny enough, the man looked disapprovingly at us. If I were to translate his expression, it seemed like he was saying, “Who gave you the right?”

I raised the corner of my lips momentarily, but it seemed like the man didn’t see it. Regardless of what was happening to me, Kim Hyun-Sung was quietly delivering information to Lee Ji-Hye.

“We obtained the food from a different starting point. I would appreciate it if you could distribute them to the people that are inside,” he explained.

“Okay! Leave it to me, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Were there other survivors…”

“I didn’t see any,” he said.

“I-I see. That’s unfortunate,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“There could be some nearby, so we’ll probably search that area one more time sometime soon,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“Oh! Okay…”

I don’t think there was going to be enough food since Kim Hyun-Sung only brought 10 bags. Sharing that food amongst 30 people wasn’t going to fill their hunger. They may be able to endure it for now, but their hunger would remain.

While holding the two bags, Park Deok-Gu and I passed by the hungry demons and entered the shelter. During that moment, people kept looking at us with a strange gaze, causing Park Deok-Gu to talk with a bit of anxiety.

“Hyung-nim, are we really not going to share?”

“We’re not philanthropists,” I answered.

“I mean, I know that, but… I don’t feel good about this since it makes us look like the bad guys. I also can’t help but feel a bit bad after seeing the people that came outside…” Park Deok-Gu explained.

“Why are you worried about how they’re feeling?” I asked.

“I-It just makes us look bad…” he said.

“Deok-Gu, they should be thanking us for getting food while putting our life on the line. The fact that they were trying to just casually take our food too was amusing. This shelter that we’re in belongs to Kim Hyun-Sung, not them. We helped just as much as we received help and not only that, we handed over a portion of the food that was originally ours. I think that’s the least we could do. Moreover, Kim Hyun-Sung clearly knew about it, he didn’t say anything to us…” I explained to him.

“Hm…”

“If they want better treatment, then they need to start fighting too, although, I don’t think they’ll be able to do that… Kim Hyun-Sung may also be thinking that others will get motivated after seeing us, but I can’t say for sure what the outcome will be,” I told him.

“Oh… so is it his plan to help people realize that they’ll get better treatment if they fight by letting them see us carry a lot of food?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I’m sure he’s hoping for that to happen,” I answered.

Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t stupid, so I’m sure a part of him was expecting that to happen.

While walking to the place we were staying at, I didn’t see Jung Ha-Yan. I thought those that didn’t go out to hunt had things to do here and it seemed like everyone was working. They were either cleaning up the place or moving heavy rocks to build a barrier. Jung Ha-Yan was probably helping those people out.

It was obvious who was placed in charge while we were gone.

‘Lee Ji-Hye.’

She was in charge of the people in this shelter. It was her job to distribute, to report to Kim Hyun-Sung, and to also be the first to greet him. I couldn't help but smile after getting an idea of what she was up to.

"Deok-Gu," I called out.

"What's up?" he asked.

"You remember Jung Ha-Yan, right?" I asked.

"You're talking about the lady with the injured leg that you helped, right?" he asked me.

"Yeah," I answered.

I took out some items from the bag and handed them to Park Deok-Gu.

"Give them to her and take care of her for me," I requested.

"Hyung-nim why… oh…" he said.

Park Deok-Gu looked like he was up to something.

"I understand. Just leave this to me!" he said excitedly.

He immediately understood what I wanted. Even though we only got together recently, it seemed like he quickly caught on to what I wanted since we were always together.

He understood that I was laying down the foundation in order to get her to our side. Of course, it was far from having romantic feelings, but making her rely on us could be pretty simple, especially in a situation like this.

I recalled Jung Ha-Yan's nature as an innocent supporter while Kim Hyun-Sung's nature was a kind-hearted mediator and even though they sounded similar, there was a clear difference. Being innocent and kind-hearted were two different natures.

"Tainting something innocent is easy," I said.

"What are you talking about?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s nothing,” I told him.

She would probably prove what I just said through a small experiment.

CHAPTER 10
JUNG HA-YAN (1)

An invisible rank was being formed. Even monsters that weren't able to talk created ranks amongst themselves, so it would be strange if a subtle difference in class didn't exist in this situation. In any place where humans lived, it was a very natural reaction.

"First," I started.

Kim Hyun-Sung was at the top of the pyramid since he created this place. I didn't know what happened during the process of finding a shelter, but the people here thoroughly trusted him. If I were in the same situation, I would've reacted the same way.

Not only did I fall into an unknown place, but the unknown place was filled with monsters.

Kim Hyun-Sung already got points for fighting the monsters with a sword and on top of that, he was too nice for his own good. Thus, it was only natural for people to look up to him.

Next would probably be Lee Ji-Hye. She stood next to Kim Hyun-Sung and picked up anything that gave her an advantage. Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung, who often roamed around outside, she spent the majority of her time inside the shelter distributing supplies, being vigilant, and was in charge of managing tasks that required manpower.

There were a few guys that were part of Lee Ji-Hye's group and they were quite powerful. Of course, they couldn't openly use this power or abuse it just because they were conscious of Kim Hyun-Sung, but I had a feeling that something would happen every time Kim Hyun-Sung went out.

"Then, what are we hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"You can say that we're right under Kim Hyun-Sung since we have the strength to

fight and obtain supplies," I answered.

"Hm…"

"Of course, the other survivors probably aren't too happy about seeing us," I added.

"But, in the beginning…"

"Of course, they were happy to see us in the beginning, but after what happened yesterday, I'm sure they think badly of us. It's no different from us expressing that we want to move independently. If I were to express it in a more negative way, it's like we're telling them that it's not our responsibility to feed them," I explained.

"But our portion is in the supplies that those guys took. Shouldn't they be thanking us?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I'm sure some of them do feel that way, but… it's part of human nature for people to keep new powers in check, even within a small, useless group like this," I said.

"Does that mean that Kim Hyun-Sung is keeping us in check?" he asked.

"No, I'm sure that he doesn't even think that he owns this place, to begin with," I answered.

"So who in the world is being wary…"

"Of course, the people who think this place belongs to them," I said before Park Deok-Gu could finish his question.

Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't the one acting like he was the king of this place. It was Lee Ji-Hye who was picking up the crumbs from under him.

"I think I understand what you're saying," Park Deok-Gu said.

"Even though Kim Hyun-Sung is ranked above everyone here, that woman is the one that's controlling everyone. Not only does he not have the time to manage this place, but he spends the majority of his time outside. Where power is needed, the one that has it is the king, and where food and shelter are needed, the one that possesses those is the king. Kim Hyun-Sung may have power, but that woman has the supplies and a comfortable shelter," I explained.

“Are you talking about Lee Ji-Hye?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I nodded and then continued talking. “That’s right.”

“……”

“She gives more to people that are on her side and to the people that she’s wary of, all she has to do is slightly push them away and put them at a disadvantage. Power creates discrimination and I’m sure Jung Ha-Yan is one of the people that Lee Ji-Hye is wary of… that’s probably why Jung Ha-Yan got excluded and is now doing difficult work,” I told him.

“Since when have you been watching Ms. Ha-Yan so closely?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I’ll need to watch her even closer from now on,” I said.

Park Deok-Gu quietly nodded.

This was only the beginning of watching Jung Ha-Yan. It was a decision I made on impulse after reading Lee Ji-Hye and Jung Ha-Yan’s nature. One was a selfish and ambitious person and the other was an innocent supporter. With these, I believed that I could really bring out the result that I wanted.

* * *

“Ms. Ha-Yan, you need to do better,” a male survivor said.

“Sorry? Okay…” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“You’re not the only one that’s tired. Everyone is working hard. At times like these, everyone needs to work together… if you keep working like this, we’ll have no choice but to reduce your portion of the supplies,” explained

“I understand…” she answered.

“I’m sure you’ve heard, but the situation isn’t that great, so you just answering that you understand won’t change anything. We don’t know how long we’ll be staying here and obtaining supplies from the other starting points isn’t easy either. Monsters could ambush this place while Mr. Hyun-Sung is out, so building a wall is just as important,” the male survivor explained.

“Yes, I understand. I-I’m really sorry,” Jung Ha-Yan apologized.

“Tsk, if you don’t want to get kicked out, work hard and don’t take breaks. If we continue to find survivors and there’s more of us, you may get kicked out. Jeez, why are the people that came in this time so selfish…” the male survivor said.

“Sorry?” Jung Ha-Yan asked, she didn’t quite hear the latter part of his sentence.

“It’s nothing. Anyways, please do better.”

“Yes, yes, I understand,” she replied.

She saw the man head outside after angrily mumbling to himself.

Jung Ha-Yan couldn’t help but lower her head. She wasn’t sure of what she did wrong, but it seemed like the man didn’t like how she did her portion of the work. No, she was certain that it was the case. It had already been several days since she failed to meet her quota, so it was only natural for him to get angry.

‘I’m such a fool.’

People had called her slow and sluggish before, but she really hated herself for not being able to work faster even in a situation like this.

‘It hurts.’

When she glanced down, she saw how messed up her hands were. Almost all of her nails were falling out and even though it was painful, she was able to somewhat agree with what the man from earlier told her.

‘Everyone is working hard to survive.’

Mr. Hyun-Sung, Ki-Young, and Deok-Gu were fighting hard outside and the people here were working hard in building the wall. Compared to the situation before where she was frantically running around by herself and didn’t know when she was going to die, this place was no different from heaven.

If Mr. Ki-Young didn’t help her back then, then the monsters would’ve definitely caught her. Her face turned red for some reason after recalling how she came all the way here in a manner that looked and felt like she was getting hugged by him. She

couldn't help but feel embarrassed when she recalled that it was her first time to be in such close physical contact with a man.

While she absent-mindedly recalled that moment, Jung Ha-Yan nodded when she heard a person's voice next to her.

"I hope you can understand, Ms. Ha-Yan," Seok-Woo said.

"Oh, Mr. Seok-Woo," she said.

"I'm sure it's because he has been really stressed recently," Seok-Woo explained to her.

"I-Is that so?" she asked.

"Yes. It's because Mr. Hyun-Sung has been going out a lot recently that he believes that building a wall should also be of the utmost importance. I'm sure Ms. Ji-Hye shares the same opinion. Since we don't know how long we'll be staying here, it's best to have all our defenses set up, so it's only natural for him to be on edge," Seok-Woo continued explaining.

"Oh, I un-understand that too."

"But he seems to be more agitated than usual today. To me, I think you're one of the hardest workers here… so I'll try talking to him later. Let's go eat," Seok-Woo suggested.

"Oh… okay," Jung Ha-Yan said weakly.

"I heard that Mr. Hyun-Sung obtained some supplies at a checkpoint," Seok-Woo said.

"Oh really?" she asked.

"Yes. I heard it from Ms. Ji-Hye, so I'm sure he did," Seok-Woo answered.

"That's a relief, hehe," Jung Ha-Yan said with a giggle.

Yoo Seok-Woo.

He was the only person that she was able to talk to here. As someone that was in

charge of this task, he seemed like he tried to help those that had recently joined, but he was also a sociable person so he talked to her often.

“Anyways, is the work difficult?” Seok-Woo asked Ha-Yan.

“Of-Of course it’s difficult, but I’m sure there are others doing more difficult work than me,” she answered.

“But still, I’m sure it’s not easy doing this kind of work… so you can slack a bit,” he suggested.

“No, I haven’t fulfilled my quota yet… so I shouldn’t slack. You’re even working despite being injured…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“As someone that manages, I’m not required to do a lot of physical work, hahaha, so this is nothing for me. Haha,” he said while chuckling.

After chatting about various topics, they arrived at the distribution table and saw a few people lining up. Jung Ha-Yan didn’t see Mr. Deok-Gu or Ki-Young, so she assumed that they had either eaten already or were at a different place.

‘It hasn’t been that long since they returned from the hunt.’

She thought that they probably wanted to rest their exhausted bodies.

“Please line up on this side and receive your portion when it’s your turn,” a person announced.

“Okay,” the survivors answered.

“Oh, okay,” Jung Ha-Yan answered quietly.

After receiving her portion with both hands, she found a decent place to sit and saw how the other survivors gathered and ate together. She thought about discreetly joining them, but because of her timid personality, it wasn’t easy for her to talk first or be with other strangers.

“I’m sure it’s because we’re in a difficult situation,” Seok-Woo commented.

“Sorry?” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“I’m talking about the other survivors. Everyone is in a difficult situation so they don’t have the luxury to take care of others. In addition, since you recently joined us, they’re a bit wary of you,” he explained.

“Oh… i-is that so? I-I thought it was because I wasn’t a good worker…” she said.

“No, you’re working harder than anyone Ms. Ha-Yan. Once time passes by and you get used to this work, I’m sure everyone will accept you, just like me,” he said, comforting her.

“T-Thank you for taking care of me,” she told him.

“It’s nothing. I’m only doing what’s right. I want to become closer to you, Ms. Ha-Yan,” Seok-Woo said.

“Oh! I feel the same way. Thank you so much for helping me in many ways,” she said.

Thinking about it now, Seok-Woo had helped her out a lot. From when she first came here up until now, he always talked to her first, tried hard to connect her with other people, and tried to accommodate her in many ways.

‘I’m thankful to him.’

When she unknowingly placed a piece of bread in her mouth, she felt Yoo Seok-Woo grabbing her hand.

“Oh…” was all she said.

Jung Ha-Yan tried to pull her hand out by using a bit of force, but she failed. When she looked over, she saw Yoo Seok-Woo looking at her.

“P-Please let go of my hand,” she said.

“Sorry?” he asked, dumbfounded.

“P-Please let me go. W-Why are you suddenly,” she said while stuttering.

“But, just now…”

“T-That’s not what I meant,” she told him.

Jung Ha-Yan quickly looked around, but she didn't see anyone. She turned and saw that the Yoo Seok-Woo who always smiled at her, now had a different look. His smile was no longer there and he was now looking at her with an absurd expression.

"Ms. Ha-Yan," he called out.

"Yes? Yes?"

"Did you think that I was doing charity work for you?" Seok-Woo asked her.

"Wh-What do you mean?" she asked.

"You're really slow. If I offer you something, then you should offer me something too," he answered.

"I-I don't understand. W-Why are you acting like this…" she told him.

"You do know that I gave you many favors and did many things for you, right?" he asked.

"I-I don't know what you mean. I… I'm thankful that you helped me…" she said, stuttering.

"Oh my gosh… are you really that dumb? Or are you pretending to be dumb? Should I just be blunt about it?" he asked angrily.

"P-Please let go of my hand. I-It hurts. It hurts…" Jung Ha-Yan pleaded.

"I'm telling you that you should look good in front of me if you want to live a comfortable life here, you stupid woman. Still don't get the picture?" he said, bluntly.

His eyes looked scary and this was her first time experiencing something like this. Jung Ha-Yan didn't know how she got into this situation. One thing she was certain about, however, was that she wanted to get out of this place.

As she desperately tried to pull her hand out, she heard a loud voice from behind her.

"Hey, dude. I suggest you let go of that hand if you don't want it broken," Park Deok-Gu warned.

CHAPTER 11
JUNG HA-YAN (2)

"Hey, dude. I suggest you let go of that hand if you don't want it broken," Park Deok-Gu warned.

"Sorry?" Yoo Seok-Woo asked.

Crack!

"Ahhh!" Yoo Seok-Woo yelled.

"Ah!"

I[1] wasn't exactly sure what happened. The moment a large shadow covered my face, I ended up closing my eyes. However, the scream that I heard was real. When I opened my eyes, I saw Park Deok-Gu quietly looking down and Yoo Seok-Woo screaming while sitting on the ground.

"Mr. D-Deok-Gu?" I asked.

"Ahhhh…" Yoo Seok-Woo continued to scream.

"You're such a scumbag. Look, it's not even broken so stop crying like a baby," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"Ahhhh…" Yoo Seok-Woo screamed again.

Park Deok-Gu raised his large hand into the air once more. With his hand exactly above Yoo Seok-Woo's head, it made a *thwack* sound as it landed on his head. As if he got hit with a blunt weapon, the way Yoo Seok-Woo fell on the ground looked absurd.

"Ahhh! Uh… ugh…" Yoo Seok-Woo groaned.

"Hey, stop overreacting. I didn't even hit you that hard… someone might think that we have a newborn baby here because of your screams," Park Deok-Gu told him.

When he lifted his large foot, Yoo Seok-Woo's body floated in the air for a moment. Park Deok-Gu kicked him. I was worried that he sustained serious injuries because he was curled up on one side of the wall.

"I-I'm fine now, so please stop. He'll get hurt, Mr. D-Deok-Gu," I said to him.

"Oh…" he said.

The way Park Deok-Gu glanced down at me was scary. But if I didn't stop him, I was certain that Yoo Seok-Woo would really die because I saw him trembling while cowering on the floor.

"Don't worry too much, noonim. I just pushed and kicked him. Jeez, this dude is exaggerating…"

But this wasn't the only thing that happened. Several people came after hearing the commotion and after hearing Yoo Seok-Woo's scream, they were running on their way here.

"Stop it!" someone yelled.

"……"

"What do you think you're doing right now? Mr. Seok-Woo, are you okay?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"I-I'm fine…" he answered.

Lee Ji-Hye was the person that caught my attention the most. She came here with a few people and then looked at us with a surprised look.

"Wh-What do you think you're doing? Violence is prohibited inside the shelter," she said.

"That man started harassing Ms. Ha-Yan, so all I did was hit him," Park Deok-Gu explained.

"Is that true?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

"I saw it with my own eyes," Park Deok-Gu answered.

“It’s… not true,” Yoo Seok-Woo said.

“What?”

“Of-Of course, me grabbing Ms. Ha-Yan’s arm could cause a misunderstanding, but… it-it was an accident…” Yoo Seok-Woo explained.

“You sure talk a lot,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“St-stop it, please. Deok-Gu oppa, as I’ve mentioned earlier, violence is prohibited here. Even if Mr. Seok-Woo did something wrong, using violence without hearing his side of the story can create a sense of incongruity among the survivors. Th-this method is… this isn’t right. We should first find out who was in the wrong,” Lee Ji-Hye suggested.

“…”

“Mr. Seok-Woo, did you really grab Ms. Ha-Yan’s hand and ridicule her?” she asked him.

“N-N-N-No, I would ne-never do that. That was definitely not my intention,” he answered while stuttering.

“So what Deok-Gu oppa saw…”

“I-I think there was a bit of a misunderstanding. Of-Of course I was trying to express my feelings towards Ms. Ha-Yan, but I misunderstood because I thought she felt the same way… I-I think that’s what caused this,” Yoo Seok-Woo explained.

“Is this true?” Lee Ji-Hye asked me.

“Yes, yes… it-it’s true,” he answered.

“Could you please tell me exactly what you said to her?” she asked.

“I told her that I wanted to become closer to her and Ms. H-Ha-Yan responded positively, so I… I guess I misunderstood her,” Yoo Seok-Woo answered.

“Ms. Ha-Yan, please tell me the truth. What Mr. Seok-Woo said just now, is it true?” she asked me.

Many eyes were on me and of course, I wasn't used to it since they weren't looking at me in a friendly way.

I instantly realized that no one was on my side here.

When my arms and legs started shaking because of my nervousness, I saw Lee Ji-Hye staring at me as if she was pressuring me to confess. For some reason, I found it difficult to talk.

"Th-that's true, b-but after that, Mr. Se-Se-Seok-Woo… f-forcefully pulled my arm and s-said that… i-if I wanted to live comfortably here… I-I was a bit surprised…" I said.

"Please answer properly, Ms. Ha-Yan. I can't hear what you're saying, so please calmly answer my question," Lee Ji-Hye told me.

"S-so…"

"So what you're saying is that Mr. Seok-Woo did tell you that he wanted to become closer to you and you agreed to that, right?" she asked me.

"Sorry? Yes… b-but, I didn't know that's… w-what he meant…" I told her.

"I asked you whether it was true or not," Lee Ji-Hye said coldly.

"I-It's true. B-But…"

"Excuse me, Ms. Ha-Yan" Lee Ji-Hye said, interrupting me.

"Yes?"

"Wasn't it you that misled and gave him an opportunity? If I recall correctly, since you arrived here, you've been hanging out with Mr. Seok-Woo. Am I wrong?" she asked.

"That's true, but… no matter how you look at it… Mr. S-Seok-Woo first…"

"This kind of problem occurs because there's an issue with how you usually act," she said.

"No… I, you see…" I started.

“Do you think you can just create a situation where anyone can misunderstand and then simply deny it? Same goes for you Deok-Gu oppa. I can’t believe you just beat someone up before listening to both sides…” Lee Ji-Hye told him.

When I glanced over and looked at Park Deok-Gu, he looked slightly surprised. I’m sure he was thinking that he may have made a mistake.

“Miss, is what he said true?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I-It’s true that he wanted to become closer to me… b-but…”

I became confused because I wasn’t sure where I should start my explanation. I had no idea how I was supposed to handle this unexpected situation and where I should start from. My face turned red for some reason and tears started to fill my eyes because of the way people were looking at me.

“Do you think crying will resolve the issue?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

“I-I’m sorry, I… I…”

“Just saying that you’re sorry isn’t going to work. Everyone hasn't been in a good mood these days… and Deok-Gu oppa… of course, I’m thankful that you helped a woman who seemed to be the victim in this situation, but you shouldn’t act on your own when you haven’t even heard both sides of the story. I think you… were a bit careless,” she explained.

“Ugh…”

“I’m not sure who’s the victim and who’s the perpetrator in this situation…”

“I-I’m sorry,” I said, apologizing.

“Apologizing won’t resolve this issue,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“Please apologize to Mr. Seok-Woo properly since he’s the victim,” she told me.

“I, I… I’m…”

“What’s going on?” someone asked.

* * *

“What’s going on?”

I[2] was able to answer the question even though I was the one who asked.

The situation in front of me was suitable and excellent. I thought something was going to happen sometime soon, but I didn’t think it was going to be like this.

Park Deok-Gu looked slightly surprised and Jung Ha-Yan was shedding tears like a waterfall. Of course, she would think that the situation was unfair.

It was obvious who the victim and the perpetrator were.

Well, it was none of my business whether Jung Ha-Yan really was trying to use this guy named Yoo Seok-Woo, but the fact that Jung Ha-Yan was being cornered was pretty important to me.

Lee Ji-Hye spoke up first while looking at me.

“I’m glad you’re here Ki-Young oppa. You see!”

“Are you out of your mind?” I asked, interrupting her.

“Sorry?”

“I’m asking if you’re out of your mind, Ms. Ji-Hye,” I said again.

“W-What do you…”

“Do you think this place is some kind of playground? Do you think the monsters won’t hear you if you yell loudly like that? Just because we clean up outside the shelter regularly, it doesn’t mean that they can’t come here at all,” I explained.

It seemed like they had finally realized their mistake.

“Oh… you see, the current situation…”

“I watched from afar so I have a general idea of what happened, Ms. Ji-Hye. As you stated earlier, we don’t know exactly who the victim and the perpetrator are, but if

the group corners one person, I'm sure I would get scared too. What do you think about this situation then?" I asked.

"That's true, but this is clearly that woman's fault…"

"Ms. Ji-Hye, can you be certain that Mr. Seok-Woo really did nothing wrong?" I asked, interrupting her.

She probably wouldn't be able to say that she was certain. If she said that, she would be the one who would be penalized, not Yoo Seok-Woo. I saw her hesitate with an anxious and flustered look.

"Also, seeing Ms. Ha-Yan's reaction, I don't think that's what really happened… more than that, I can guarantee that Ms. Ha-Yan isn't the type to do something like that," I said confidently.

It was far-fetched and right now, I was saying things that didn't make any sense. Even though I was the one that said it, I found my words so nonsensical that they could elicit laughter from anyone.

To Jung Ha-Yan, protecting her by telling everyone that she wasn't the type of person to do that could be a statement that she would be thankful for, but that wasn't the case for other people.

I barely knew her and yet, I told them that she wasn't the type of person to do that. Other than the fact that her nature was an innocent supporter, there weren't any other real reasons I could use to guarantee that she was innocent.

Honestly, there was a lot I wanted to say. Accusing the victim of a sex-related crime in the first place was a mistake. As a woman, there was no way Lee Ji-Hye wouldn't know that. The only reason why she intentionally took Yoo Seok-Woo's side was that she had a hidden intention to strengthen her group by rejecting outsiders. If not that, then she was planning on screwing over Jung Ha-Yan from the start.

It wouldn't be bad to nitpick every single issue and logically refute them, but forcefully moving forward with it could also be effective. No, there's no way it wouldn't work.

But…

'I'm powerful.'

I was the one in power here. My words were more significant than anyone else here.

"Ms. Ha-Yan isn't the type of person to do that," I said again.

"Oh… well…"

Jung Ha-Yan looked at me after wiping her tears and the others looked at Jung Ha-Yan with hostility.

To them, they may think that this situation was unreasonable since I suddenly appeared, cleared up the misunderstanding, yelled, and was being overly biased towards one person. Despite that, I was certain that I wasn't going to be the one to receive the hate.

I started looking towards Jung Ha-Yan discreetly. A woman that was favored by the person in power. No matter how you looked at it, she was the type of character that people would hate. Especially by people like Lee Ji-Hye.

"Jeez, what are you all doing here… I think it'll be best if Mr. Yoo Woo-Seok got his wounds treated first. However, once his injuries are treated, I'll ask him properly about what exactly happened. Please move Mr. Seok-Woo away for now," I told them.

"O-Okay."

"Ms. Ji-Hye, please clean this place up so that you can start your day. Mr. Hyun-Sung will be returning soon. Deok-Gu, do a light patrol around the area since monsters might get attracted here due to the incident just now," I said.

"G-Got it hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"Also… Ms. Ha-Yan, please come with me," I said.

"Okay."

A few of the survivors gossiped among each other, Lee Ji-Hye was lightly biting her lips and Yoo Seok-Woo looked slightly anxious, but it was obvious what they were all thinking. I kind of heard what they said, but no one openly criticized my actions.

“What’s… with that woman.”

“She’s so full of herself.”

There was a better prey than me…

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Oh… okay,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

…It was a person that lacked power and could easily be taken advantage of.

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1. Jung Ha-Yan’s point of view ☜

2. Back to Lee Ki-Young’s pov ☜

CHAPTER 12
LEE JI-HYE

"Have a seat," I said.

"I-I…" stuttered Jung Ha-Yan.

I saw her hesitate. I figured that she was still shaken up after what happened because of the way her shoulders quivered every now and then. The way she wiped her tears away made her look like a child.

First of all, she was an ordinary 21-year-old woman. It was understandable for her to act that way since she had never experienced the earlier situation and of all places, she experienced it here. I didn't exactly understand what she was feeling, but Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she didn't really know what just happened and what kind of situation she was just in.

"I'm, *hiccup*… I'm sorry," Jung Ha-Yan said, apologizing.

"I'm not exactly sure what you're apologizing about," I told her.

"But I, *hiccup*… I."

"You did nothing wrong, Ms. Ha-Yan. Of course, I didn't see the situation myself… first, can you slowly explain to me what happened?" I asked her calmly.

"I-It really wasn't my i-intention. I-I just…"

"I know. You can talk to me comfortably," I said.

When I told her with a small smile, she started talking slowly.

I had a general idea of what happened and it was also a situation where I could assume what happened.

The problem was that I couldn't really understand what Jung Ha-Yan was saying. She

started rambling while crying, so it was difficult to understand her lamentations.

According to the system, her intelligence stat wasn't that low, so I guess one's intelligence wasn't measured based on simple critical thinking skills.

"A-And suddenly, Mr. Seok-Woo…" she said.

"I see… I see… so that's what happened," I said.

"H-He pulled my hand and then yelled," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Oh…" was all I said.

However, whether I was able to understand her or not wasn't important. Being sympathetic was more important. Rather than pointing out her mistake, listening to why she was crying and why she felt upset was more important.

'I'm on your side.'

I didn't say it, but that was what she was probably thinking.

"A-And then… M-Mr. Deok-Gu suddenly came and… hit that man and then Ms. Ji-Hye, *hiccup*," she continued.

"I see."

"A-And then you came…"

"Got it," I told her.

The problem was that her rant was getting longer. Fortunately, her lengthy story came to an end a few minutes later.

"It must've been hard for you," I commented.

"I-It's fine. I-I feel a bit better now," Jung Ha-Yan said.

She definitely seemed like she had calmed down a bit. Her shoulders that were shaking intermittently had calmed down and her sad expression changed into a small smile. She was finally able to relax a bit.

“Thank you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“There’s no need to thank me. It’s just the circumstance…”

“N-No. Not that, but how you said you believed me…” she said, interrupting me.

“Ohh…”

“You’ve been helping me ever since we met, but I-I haven’t done anything for you…” Jung Ha-Yan told me.

“You don’t have to worry about it.”

“C-Can I ask why you’re b-being so nice to me?” she asked, stuttering.

It was difficult to understand the key point of her question because I couldn’t understand whether she was expressing her feelings towards me or was being wary of me. I thought it was probably the latter because I thought there was a good chance that Yoo Seok-Woo approached her in a similar way that I did.

I need to give her a suitable answer.

“I just thought it was the right thing to do, but if I had to find the reason…”

“Sorry?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“I have a little sister back home and whenever I see you, you remind me of her,” I explained.

Honestly, I rarely thought about my little sister. Yul-Ha’s personality was totally different from the Jung Ha-Yan that was in front of me and other than their age, it was difficult to find anything common between them.

However, I thought that this was a suitable answer.

“Oh…”

“She’s probably around the same age as you, Ms. Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“I-I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have…” she said, apologizing.

“And your family…”

“I-I have two older sisters, but… i-it’s been a while since I lost contact with them…” she answered.

She had a dark expression, so I thought that I shouldn’t ask her any more questions.

“And your parents…” I said.

“T-They passed away,” she answered.

“It looks like we have that in common,” I commented.

“You too?”

“Yes.”

She looked happy for some reason.

“W-We’re kind of alike,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Yes, I agree,” I said.

Having something in common was a good thing.

The corner of my lips went up when I saw her quietly put her hands together.

I calculated whether I should approach her a bit more aggressively or stay back, but the problem was that I couldn’t come up with an answer. After organizing my thoughts a bit, I continued our conversation from earlier.

“If you don’t mind,” I started talking.

“Yes?” she asked.

“I would like it if you can be a bit more comfortable with me. It’s purely my own desire…”

“Oh? Oh? Okay! H-How?” she asked.

“First, let’s start by talking casually to each other,” I suggested.

“Sorry? Okay… t-then casually…” she said.

“I’ll talk casually,” I started.

“Yes… no, okay. O-Okay, o-o-oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said, stuttering.

She looked embarrassed and this was the part where I was able to confirm again that she wasn’t good at interpersonal relationships.

When I quietly looked at her using the Mind’s Eye, her overall stats were displayed before me.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Innocent Supporter]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stats]

[Strength - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 14/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 22/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 10/Above legendary growth limit]

[Overall Review - Jung Ha-Yan possesses above legendary growth limit stat. Her overall physical abilities may be low, but there's a possibility that she may grow a lot later on as a mage or a priest. Currently, Jung Ha-Yan isn't aware of the fact that she's able to feel magic. Even if she becomes a mage too, it's obvious she'll be a different mage from you, so don't stress out.]

Compared to before, her strength increased by one point while her stamina increased by two points. All this time, I guess she worked hard in building the wall.

The interesting part was that her magic stat remained at 10 points. Unlike me, who obtained magic after changing my job to a mage, she possessed magic the moment she was summoned here. She wasn't able to feel it just yet, but if I helped her, then I'm sure there was a way. While I was contemplating whether I should talk to her about mana and magic…

"U-Um Ki-Young oppa… c-can I have a moment?"

It wasn't Jung Ha-Yan's voice. The voice that I heard from behind belonged to Lee Ji-Hye.

Jung Ha-Yan revealed an anxious look in front of me.

I was able to somewhat predict that Lee Ji-Hye was going to come and find me. Although, I didn't expect that it would happen this fast.

'As expected… '

She quickly caught onto things that could put her at an advantage.

'So she wants to come to my side, huh?'

The situation earlier helped her confirm which side was more superior. I pointed out who was right and wrong between Yoo Seok-Woo and Jung Ha-Yan, but it was also a place where people were able to see who was more superior between me and Lee Ji-Hye. I'm sure Lee Ji-Hye also knew that.

No one decided on it or made a rank that could be seen with one's eyes, but she indirectly realized the fact that I was above her.

Her nature was a 'selfish and ambitious person.'

Women like her, no, people like me usually revealed two types of patterns when they found people stronger than them. They would either exclude or cling to them.

I thought that Lee Ji-Hye acted faster than I thought. Even though it wouldn't put me at a disadvantage, there was a need to think a bit more about it.

I looked at Jung Ha-Yan instead of Lee Ji-Hye and slightly opened my mouth. "Can you give us a moment? I think I need to talk with Ms. Ji-Hye," I told her.

"Oh, Yes. Got it, o-oppa," Jung Ha-Yan said.

I guess she felt a bit worried because she said the last word in a higher pitch.

In the end, when Jung Ha-Yan quietly stood up, Lee Ji-Hye sat in the same spot. Seeing as how Jung Ha-Yan kept looking back, I guess she was satisfied with the conversation we just had.

"Can I help you?" I asked Lee Ji-Hye.

"I… you see… I wanted to apologize. I'm sorry for causing a scene," she said.

"No, you did nothing wrong, Ms. Ji-Hye," I told her.

"No, Ki-Young oppa. It was my first time dealing with a situation like that that I didn't think about what was happening outside and got heated up. I didn't even think about the people that were working hard outside…… it would've been better if I handled it quietly…" Lee Ji-Hye explained.

"It's fine. If I were in your place, I would've been surprised as well. I'm actually sorry for being too sensitive of the situation," I said.

“No, you just did what you thought was right, oppa.”

Lee Ji-Hye looked young for her age, but still, I felt strange hearing a woman who was older than me call me oppa.

“I…” she started.

“Go ahead,” I said.

“About Mr. Seok-Woo…”

“I don’t plan to summon and deal with him right now. He has to get his wounds treated first… and I also have other things I need to do,” I interrupted her and explained.

“Oh, well that’s a relief. I felt bad for bothering you about this. I was surprised earlier, so I couldn’t make a proper judgment. If you’ll let me, I’m thinking about taking proper action regarding it… can you let me handle this one?” Lee Ji-Hye asked.

I couldn’t help but think about it. I still haven’t thought about how I should deal with Yoo Seok-Woo. This place had no laws or police, so there weren’t any guidelines on how he should be punished.

“About Ms. Ha-Yan…” I started.

“Thinking about it now, I think I was a bit harsh on Ms. Ha-Yan, so if you’ll let me…”

“You can handle it. You seemed to be the one that has been managing this place from the beginning… I crossed the line and interfered, so I’m sorry,” I said.

“Oh! No, that’s not what I meant,” she said.

“Yes, I understand what you’re saying, however, I hope there isn’t another situation that’ll make me worry,” I told her.

The point was to acknowledge a part of Lee Ji-Hye’s power. I was certain that this woman knew exactly what I was talking about earlier.

‘I have no intention of stopping you.’

But you better not do anything that would get on my nerves. I was basically telling her to keep a low profile.

When I finished talking, I saw her slowly trying to grab my hand. When looking at Lee Ji-Hye objectively, she was a beauty. I tried my best to quietly suppress my heartbeat, but I wasn't used to such close physical contact. No, more than that, I was curious as to why she was approaching me this way.

"I'm sure working outside is hard enough… so thank you so much for taking care of the issues inside," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"It's not so bad," I said.

"If there's anything I can help you with, please let me know anytime. Anything," she said.

The way she gently stroked my thigh was also a spectacle. At this point, I obviously knew what this woman wanted.

"Anything?" I asked.

"Yes, anything," she answered.

I couldn't help but be surprised because she was more aggressive in her approach than I thought. This woman may be silly, but she wasn't stupid. In addition, she also knew that I wasn't stupid.

What I saw in her was a strange desire.

'Desire for power? Ambition?'

It didn't matter which of these she wanted.

"I like ambitious men," Lee Ji-Hye commented.

To me, power and ambition were defense mechanisms that existed to protect myself. Of course to Lee Ji-Hye, cause or motives weren't important to her. What she wanted was the result.

There were benefits if I were to get close to this woman, but the problem was that I

wasn't interested in her at all.[1] The only thing Lee Ji-Hye possessed was the ability to control this stupid group. It may be useful to me, but that was it.

She knew that very well and that was why she decided to come here.

I may not be of much use since I wasn't really attached to the group, to begin with, but having them wouldn't be so bad. No, they may actually be of some use for something else. Maybe something related to Jung Ha-Yan…

'What should I do… '

I'm sure Lee Ji-Hye realized that I wasn't attracted to her. If she didn't, then thinking of her as a stupid woman was only right.

'I hope that's not the case.'

Did she want a contractual relationship? Or a simple one?

There were a lot of things that Lee Ji-Hye could gain from me. Reinstating the power that almost fell from her or establishing a connection with the person that may become the second most powerful person in the group.

She could appeal to the public and show that she and I didn't have a bad relationship. Whatever it was, being on good terms with her wasn't a bad thing. Instead, having the mindset of us being enemies or allies was stupidity.

"What can I gain?" I asked her.

"Perhaps, Ms. Ha-Yan?"

As the corner of my lips went up, I placed my body close to hers. I saw that Lee Ji-Hye's face was becoming filled with strange excitement and anticipation.

'Nice.'

It was a feeling I haven't had in a long time. I slightly closed my lips and at first sight, it may look like a romantic scene. However, we were both probably thinking about different things.

'Let's use each other.'

I spoke with a small smile.

“I think we are kind of alike.”

“Right, I think so too,” she said in agreement.

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1. The direct translation would be ‘The problem was that getting closer to this woman would benefit me’ but it was edited for clarity ☜

CHAPTER 13
FLUSTERED (1)

[Checking Player Lee Ji-Hye's Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Lee Ji-Hye]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Selfish and ambitious person]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stats]

[Strength - 05/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 09/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 10/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 20/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 08/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 15/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 00/Below average growth limit]

[Overall Review - Congratulations, Lee Ki-Young, you've done it now. The perfect couple with low stats and poor potential has been born. Please make sure Lee Ji-Hye uses birth control because if she really gives birth to a baby, I'll feel bad for it.]

'We're not a couple,' I said to myself.

Lee Ji-Hye was smarter than I thought. No, if I were to be specific, she wasn't exceptionally smart, but she was good at judging the situation, making appropriate decisions, and taking action. She was quick to catch on and knew exactly what people wanted.

She was unknowingly wary of Jung Ha-Yan, so seeing how she let me handle her, I had an idea of what she wanted.

I couldn't understand why Kim Hyun-Sung had put her in charge of the group.

Butting heads was really unnecessary, but she probably did that to at least show that she had power. Of course, she may have other goals, but there was really no reason for me to know.

I gulped and then started looking at Lee Ji-Hye's stats again.

Her stat's rate of increase wasn't bad and compared to last time, her strength increased by one point, her intelligence increased by two points, and her luck increased by three points.

'How did they increase?'

For intelligence, I can assume that it was not simply based on one's critical thinking or knowledge. For Jung Ha-Yan, despite possessing an abundance of intelligence points, she seemed to be somewhat lacking in these departments.

On the other hand, Lee Ji-Hye was different. Despite possessing fewer intelligence points than Jung Ha-Yan, she was quick to catch on to things. I thought maybe magic or having knowledge in a specific area was the basis of determining one's intelligence.

I was a bit puzzled about the luck stat. When I recently checked Lee Ji-Hye's stat, her luck was at 12 points, but it increased overnight and I couldn't understand why. I thought maybe it had to do with me since my luck stat was high, but it was nothing more than an assumption.

I needed to think about the stats, and how they worked a bit more.

“You’re up early,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“I had some things I needed to think about,” I said.

I saw Lee Ji-Hye staring at me from the side. It seemed that she had a great day yesterday since she looked significantly better than before.

“Take care of Yoo Seok-Woo however you want and keep an eye on Jung Ha-Yan. If you find out anything special about her, report it to me right away,” I told her.

“I don’t think that’s how you should be talking to the woman you kissed…” Lee Ji-Hye commented.

“Don’t say anything stupid…”

“Well, I’ll do my best. I think I know what you’re planning, but there’s something special about that woman, right? She asked.

‘She’s really quick to catch on.’

“There’s no need for you to know, noona,” I said.

“Hey!”

When I called her noona, Lee Ji-Hye became flustered. I was sure she was a bit stressed when it came to her age. I saw Lee JI-Hye lightly biting her lips.

It was impossible for us to become a couple, or comrades that protected each other’s backs overnight. We were in a contractual relationship. Even though there wasn’t any information about the involved parties, we agreed to use each other’s powers to some extent and proceeded with the contractual process. Even if the contract could be easily broken, we trusted each other, so we would probably make small contributions in the interest of each other.

The question was how long this relationship was going to last. It wouldn’t be a problem if we didn’t cross the line and continue to respect each other’s boundaries, but no one knew what was going to happen in the future after all.

After releasing a light sigh, I spoke. “But why did you choose me, Ms. Ji-Hye?”

“I told you, Ki-Young oppa. Ambitious men are my type,” she answered.

Lee Ji-Hye wasn’t the only one that had to live up to her expectations.

Just like how I can cut her off anytime, she could do the same to me.

What was important right now was my growth and Jung Ha-Yan.

Lee Ji-Hye probably wasn’t going to tell everyone what happened between us because that would be advantageous to her too. However, the atmosphere between us may imply that something had happened, and knowing how that was going to affect Jung Ha-Yan was important.

Having poor interpersonal relationships meant that she wasn’t good at expressing and accepting her emotions.

Her parents passed away and she lost contact with her sisters a long time ago. That meant that there was a good chance that she wasn’t good at making connections with people because of a lack of affection and attention.

Jung Ha-Yan had to depend and rely on me more. She had to be attached to me. Lee Ji-Hye was planning to help me with this conundrum.

* * *

Yoo Seok-Woo was handled faster than I thought that a trial didn’t even have to happen. He must’ve caught on to the fact that Lee Ji-Hye had sided with me because he immediately acknowledged his mistake and received a punishment that everyone agreed with.

Of course, Lee Ji-Hye used her influence during this process and the funny thing was that she wore the ‘there’s nothing I can do about it’ attitude.

Not only did she start turning everyone’s attention towards me, but she started working on turning the public’s opinion to Jung Ha-Yan, who was part of the reason.

‘I had to do it because of Lee Ki-Young.’

'He cherishes Jung Ha-Yan.'

Were the types of nuances that spread like wildfire.

Of course, Jung Ha-Yan had no choice but to be hated by the people here, but through this process of influencing the public's opinion, I felt that Lee Ji-Hye was more spiteful than I imagined.

'Sure enough, she's a woman that's good at bullying people.'

If bullying had a stat, she would probably be at the above legendary rank.

Lee Ji-Hye never moved. However, she managed to use the people around her to create the best environment where Jung Ha-Yan would be completely isolated or harassed.

I had no idea what Jung Ha-Yan was going to do when she was placed in a situation where everyone disliked her. In the end, the only person she would be able to rely on would be me. Thanks to that, Jung Ha-Yan had been ranting to me for the past few days.

"S-So… *hiccup*…"

"Are you okay?" I asked her.

"Yes, yes… thank you, o-o-oppa. I talked too much about myself… I'm sure you're busy…" she said.

"No, I'm not busy at all. I'm actually thankful that you told me everything. If you work a bit harder, I'm sure the others will acknowledge you. Of course, I already know that you're already working hard," I said, comforting her.

Honestly, pretending to be a good person wasn't easy.

"Still…"

"It'll be fine since you'll be going out to hunt with us from now on. I already told Mr. Hyun-Sung too…" I told her.

"I-Is it really okay for… someone like me?" she asked.

“Of course.”

When I lightly patted her head, a small smile appeared on her face. I guess this could be considered an achievement.

Jung Ha-Yan found it difficult and scary to make contact with other people, so seeing this kind of reaction made me think that all the time we spent together hadn’t been in vain.

I wanted to be certain of what she thought of me before we headed outside. But I already knew that I shouldn’t approach her rashly.

‘Slowly… ’

I didn’t want a relationship that would easily crumble like a sand castle. Jung Ha-Yan and I had to have a stronger relationship.

“I-I’m glad I have you o-oppa. I-If I was by myself…”

“You have no idea how relieved I am that you’re by my side, Ha-Yan. More than that, have you been able to feel your mana moving? Any progress?” I asked.

“Yes, for now. I think I can feel what’s inside me and when I channel it to my arm, I feel a bit stronger…” she answered.

“And your magic?” I asked.

“I-I’m not sure yet,” she answered.

Tasks related to Jung Ha-Yan weren't the only thing I had been working on.

Just like Park Deok-Gu, who was struggling to familiarize himself with his new job as a shieldbearer. I had enough time to think a bit more about my job as a mage.

Recently, Kim Hyun-Sung has been going out alone more often. It was probably because he wanted to give us more time.

‘Image.’

Magic was the result of imagining the building process of mana. Spells were required

in order to make the visualization process a bit easier. I struggled quite a bit in trying to materialize magic. I had the basic knowledge in my head, but I found it hard to show results when using it.

I built a solid tower with some of the mana that was inside me and at the same time, I drew an image of the magic that I wanted to materialize inside my head. I imagined fire rising out of my finger.

“Flame, answer, to my voice,” I said.

At the same time, a small flame appeared on my finger. I saw Jung Ha-Yan’s slightly surprised expression when she noticed it.

“Wow…” she said.

“I think visualizing it in your head is important. It will be more convenient if the spell is simple, but if the magic is complex, I don’t think it matters if the spell is long… the point is visualizing it in your head,” I explained to her. The downside was that the majority of the spells that were easy to visualize were unnecessarily long.

It wasn’t an exaggeration to say that the spell was like an edgy teenager, thinking about this made me embarrassed about using them.

“I see.”

“For me, rather than trying to manifest the magic myself, I imagined the concept of borrowing the power… I’m sure you’ll be able to find your own way too. No, it may feel difficult right now, but once you obtain your job, it may become a bit easier,” I said, trying to comfort her.

“Oh… I see,” was all she said.

It was possible that she would not be able to use magic until she obtained a job. Despite possessing many points in the magic stat, Kim Hyun-Sung couldn’t use magic, so I think there existed a border between jobs that we couldn’t cross. Despite that, it was obvious as to why I purposely poured knowledge about magic to her.

‘It’s all for a good impression.’

Teaching and learning from each other was the easiest way to get close to each other.

There was no harm in teaching her things in advance even though she was still going to learn them later.

“It’s possible that you’re not able to use magic until you obtain a job, but keep practicing on building your mana.”

“Okay, leave it to me o-oppa. I’ll do my best,” she said.

I automatically nodded.

[Magic has been increased by one point.]

[Intelligence has been increased by one point.]

‘Nice.’

“The more you use it, the more your magic will increase, so I personally am really looking forward to the day when you can use magic,” I told her.

“Oh, okay.”

“Then, should we stop here for today?” I asked her.

“T-T-There’s a part that I don’t quite understand…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Oh yeah?’

“Yes. S-So recently, my magic increased again…” she started.

While listening to her explanation, I couldn’t help but check her status window. I was curious as to how much progress she made up until now.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Innocent Supporter]

[Job - Mage - Average Rank]

[Stat]

[Strength - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 14/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 22/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 15/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Attribute - How to become a mage - Epic Rank]

'What? Mage?'

Her mage job was what caught my attention.

"My mana doesn't seem to be moving very well," she said.

I saw Jung Ha-Yan's bright smile again.

'Who are you?'

I couldn't help but notice that something was wrong.

CHAPTER 14
FLUSTERED (2)

“My mana doesn’t seem to be moving a lot,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

‘What the.’

I studied her expression again, but it was the same as before. There was a disconnect between the way she was smiling as if she didn't know anything and the fact that she had been crying not long ago.

I looked at her status window again and as expected, nothing changed.

I definitely wasn’t seeing things.

[Job - Mage - Average Rank]

Jung Ha-Yan already got her job.

‘Since when?’

The last time I checked her status window was three days ago. It was close to when I started giving her somewhat of a lesson about magic.

Even though she didn’t say anything, the moment I indirectly talked about magic, there was a possibility that she obtained her job back then.

[Attribute - How to become a mage - Epic Rank]

[Jung Ha-Yan has mastered the foundation of magic. Her magic point will

permanently increase by two points. Her growth potential will increase dramatically.]

'What's this… '

Even her attribute was outrageous because the moment she understood her job, she obtained an epic rank attribute. Based on the circumstances, I'm sure that was what happened.

It was my first time seeing a case where a person obtained their job after learning the basic knowledge related to that job, and to even acquire a new attribute at that. If it was possible for other people to experience the same thing, then I'm sure Kim Hyun-Sung would have picked this method.

Jung Ha-Yan was definitely a special case.

When I was deep into my thoughts, Jung Ha-Yan started staring at me as if she was feeling a bit anxious.

"Um… o-oppa?" she called out.

"Oh, sorry, I was thinking about something for a moment… you asked about moving your mana, right?" I asked.

"Yes, yes! I took your advice and tried, but it was too difficult…" she told me.

She shouldn't experience any difficulties.

"That's strange… maybe it's because you possess a larger amount of mana than me," I said.

I saw her slightly extending her hand out. When I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand, I started letting my weak mana flow down to her. I tried to build the mana by letting it flow inside of her, but Jung Ha-Yan's mana didn't budge. She wasn't slow-witted.

'She's blocking me.'

She was intentionally restraining me from moving her mana.

When I frowned, that was when Jung Ha-Yan's mana started flowing in the direction that my mana was flowing to.

"Y-You're amazing oppa," she complimented me.

'She's really... '

"Let's try visualizing," I suggested.

"Excuse me?"

"Try visualizing the spell. A flame rising from your hand… you can do what I did just now, right?" I asked her.

"Oh! Yes, yes!" she answered excitedly.

I had stacked up enough mana to meet the conditions. Since we came this far, visualizing a small flame should be easy for her. However, her mana collapsed right away. But it wasn't because too much time had elapsed or because she failed, but because Jung Ha-Yan made the mana collapse herself.

"A-As expected, it's still difficult for me. W-Why am I like this… y-you worked so hard to teach me…" she said in disappointment.

She even started crying.

'What's going on?'

"No, it's natural to fail and it's probably because you don't have a job yet. If you join us for the hunt, I'm sure you'll do better, right?" I said, trying to comfort her.

Even though I discreetly mentioned her job, she didn't show any reaction.

"C-Can I try again?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Wow, look at the time. Let's stop here for today since I have things I need to take care of," I told her.

"D-Do you have plans or… a-are you meeting with Miss H-Hye-young… today too?" she asked, stuttering.

Park Hye-Young was the woman that Lee Ji-Hye sent to me. After that day, Lee Ji-Hye sent a person that could connect us together. She told me that Park Hye-Young would be useful for many things, but nothing happened between us so far. So far, all I heard from her were the status quo of the group and stories within the base.

While I was contemplating what I should say, I heard a voice from outside.

“Mr. Ki-Young? Are you busy?” Park Hye-Young asked.

“Oh, one moment please,” I said.

‘Park Hye-Young.’

I couldn’t tell whether it was the perfect timing or not, but when I looked at Jung Ha-Yan, her expression didn’t really change.

“Oh! Y-You already had plans. I-I didn’t know…” she said.

“No, I didn’t have plans with Miss Hye-Young. I think something happened, so can you give us a moment?” I asked.

“Oh… okay,” she answered.

Jung Ha-Yan slowly stood up from her seat, and Park Hye-Young entered the room.

I didn’t call for her, so I was curious as to why she came here.

I felt Jung Ha-Yan staring at Park Hye-Young and even though I wanted to use jealousy as my weapon to some extent, I didn’t want to use it like this.

“Ha-Yan, I’ll see you tomorrow,” I said.

“Oh! Okay!”

When Jung Ha-Yan left the room, Park Hye-Young quietly sat down.

“Did something happen?” I asked her.

“I heard something interesting,” she started.

“Something interesting?”

“I heard that for the next hunt, you are going to select a few people from the base to join you,” she answered.

“Yes, that’s correct.”

“If it’s okay with you, can I take a spot?” she asked.

Park Hye-Young was pretty straightforward.

I naturally scanned Park Hye-Young using my Mind’s Eye, but none of her stats really stood out.

[Checking Player Park Hye-Young’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Park Hye-Young]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 27]

[Nature - Calculative Diplomat]

[Job - Unemployed]

[Stat]

[Strength - 10/Below epic growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Above rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 20/Above rare growth limit]

[Intelligence - 10/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 10/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 09/Below average growth limit]

[Magic - 00/Below rare growth limit]

[Overall Review - Now isn't the time for you to say something pathetic like her not having any notable abilities or uniqueness. Her overall stat has a very good balance. She'll have average growth potential with a melee or ranged job, like an archer.]

Her nature was a calculative diplomat. Without having to read the details, I had an idea about what her nature meant.

After looking at her for a bit, I continued talking. "I can't say since I recommended Miss Ha-Yan first…"

"Aren't kids like her boring?" Park Hye-Young asked.

"It doesn't matter what you think, but that's not the reason I recommended her," I said.

"Can't you work something out? I think doing that will help our relationship more…" she commented.

I didn't really know what kind of relationship we had. I think Lee Ji-Hye told her to help me with different things, and she heard some absurd stories as a result.

Park Hye-Young must have thought of me as a lewd person that fancied women.

Her stats were decent and her potential wasn't bad either. If she grew in the proper direction, then she may be able to help me, but I didn't like the fact that her nature had the word, 'calculative.' Still, I believed that she knew the concept of give and take.

"Your reason?" I asked her.

"You need people that can fight, right? Thanks to you and Mr. Deok-Gu joining, the

situation here has changed a bit. Only a few people think that Mr. Hyun-Sung will be able to do something for us. This is the place where a woman can get just as strong as a man and through a variety of systems, one can even strengthen their physical abilities," Park Hye-Young explained.

"Yes, that's correct."

"Everyone is scared of the monsters, but there are people that believe that we can hunt them. People have started forming groups saying that they were going to go out and if it comes to the point where everyone is able to fight, it won't be a loss for you if you have more people on your side. If Miss Ha-Yan returns with some special power, then this development will only speed up," she said.

"You're talking as if I'm splitting the group up," I told her.

"Did I hit a nerve?"

"No, I don't really care anyways. Does Miss Ji-Hye know that you're here?" I asked.

"Probably? Who knows what Miss Ji-Hye is thinking," she commented.

"Then the reason why you're here is…"

"I just thought that you would understand. I also don't like the fact that you keep taking that Jung Ha-Yan girl's side. Well, if you reject my offer, I'll have no choice but to wait until it's my turn…" she answered.

"I understand what you're saying."

"I knew we would see eye to eye."

"When Mr. Hyun-Sung returns, we'll probably start working, so I'll try to put in a good word for you. However, if Mr. Hyun-Sung believes that it's too much, then you may get rejected, so don't get your hopes up," I warned her.

"Just hearing that answer is enough hope for me," she said.

"Then, I look forward to working with you."

"Me too."

* * *

“That’s hilarious,” a survivor commented

“Shh, they’ll hear you,” another survivor said.

Jung Ha-Yan heard people talking around her, but she couldn’t really hear their conversation. She was actually worried about Ki-Young.

“Miss Ha-Yan! What’s on your mind?”

“Oh, oh! No, it’s nothing…” she answered.

“If you’re tired, you can rest. I’m sure you’re tired from the physical labor… pft. Well, wouldn’t it be harder for you if you worked here?” one of the survivors asked.

“Excuse me?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Look at her, pretending like she doesn’t know.”

“I told you not to do it.”

She didn’t really understand what they were trying to say, but she felt hostility from them.

She didn’t feel tired or exhausted from their words. She was used to being treated like this, after all.

Thinking about it now, it was the same as when she was little. Compared to her two older sisters, she was somewhat slow and stupid. Her oldest sister always took care of her and her second oldest sister was very smart, but the reason why they suddenly stopped contacting her was probably that she was stupid.

“Ugh… she stinks,” a survivor commented.

“He sure has interesting taste. She’s not even that pretty… pretending like she doesn’t know anything… that’s why she’s like a fox,” another survivor said.

“Shh, stop it. She’s going to hear you. What if she runs off and tattles?” they asked worriedly.

“Let her go then, I think he is probably tired of her. No, I’m sure he is fed up with her by now.”

Hearing their voices made Jung Ha-Yan’s hands tremble for some reason.

‘Ki-Young oppa.’

He was the only person she could rely on within this base. After recalling how they held hands earlier, her body shook for some reason.

Fed up?

She knew that Ki-Young didn’t treat her that way.

There was a slightly different reason as to why Ki-Young was being nice to her.

‘My heart is pounding.’

Her heart pounded as if it was going to jump out of her chest.

‘Because I’m like his little sister.’

Thinking about what he told her before, she felt a subtle pleasure. It was a very unfamiliar feeling. It was a feeling that she had never felt until now.

Her heart pounded as if someone was beating it with a hammer and she couldn’t help but cross her legs for some reason. It was even difficult for her to control her feelings.

‘I can see him again tomorrow.’

It would be just the two of them talking and he would dote on her again.

Jung Ha-Yan thought she would be able to feel the same warmth that she felt when she was with her family a long time ago.

This was a type of drug. She hid the fact that she obtained a job and an attribute because she wanted to spend more time with Ki-Young. She felt heartbroken by the fact that she had to lie to him. But if she didn’t do that, she was afraid that he may never look for her again.

Jung Ha-Yan tried her best to ignore the voices and looked in the direction where Ki-Young was.

“Oh my, were you waiting for me?”

It was Park Hye-Young, the same woman that was with Ki-Young a moment ago.

CHAPTER 15
AWAKENING

“Were you worried?” Park Hye-Young asked

“W… Well…” I started.

“You’re funny, pretending like you don’t know. You were annoyed by how I visited Ms. Ki-Young,” she pointed out.

“I-It’s not like that, Miss Hye-Young. W-Whatever Ki-Young oppa does… i-it doesn’t matter to me…” I explained.

“That’s not what your face says…” Park Hye-Young commented.

“I-It’s true.”

“Stop playing around, you bitch. Do you think that we don’t know about your cunning side? You look slow-witted and stupid, but you’re pretty smart. It hasn’t been that long since you came here, but you managed to hit the jackpot. Is seducing men with that kind of face a good technique… I just don’t understand. Or maybe it’s the men that have strange tastes. You know, some men are interested in women that are slow-witted. Pfft,” Park Hye-Young explained.

I didn’t really understand what she was saying.

“Again with that expression. I really don’t like it,” Park Hye-Young commented.

“I-I-I’m sorry,” I apologized.

“What are you apologizing about? I bet you think we’re all idiots…” she said.

“I-I don’t. I-I just…”

“Do you think that Mr. Ki-Young actually likes you? Do you think that’s why he really cherishes you?” Park Hye-Young asked, interrupting me.

“T-That’s…”

“Don’t flatter yourself, you dumb bitch, you’re just really lucky. You were just the first one that caught his attention and somehow got involved with Mr. Ki-Young. You may not know, but I know what kind of person he is. People like Lee Ki-Young don’t trust people, to begin with, they get tired of people easily and once a person is of no use to them, they’ll cast them aside,” Park Hye-Young explained.

“O-Oppa isn’t that kind of person. And…”

“That’s probably what you want to believe because that kind of belief is what helps you sleep at night. But it’s unfortunate since what I said about him is right… things may seem okay right now, but once time passes, things will change. In my eyes, you’re the type of person that people easily get tired of. Pfft. Has no one ever told you about this?” Park Hye-Young asked with a smirk.

I bit my lips because I was very confused.

My head was feeling really hot. I wanted to yell out something, but my voice wasn’t coming out. My body simply continued to tremble.

“I’ve never seen you with that expression before. Are you mad? Did I hit a nerve? People have always abandoned you, right?” Park Hye-Young asked.

“N-N-N-N-No, that’s not,” I answered while stuttering.

“Yeah right. It’s written all over your face. If not, then maybe people have taken things from you? Regardless of which one you are, you’re just a miserable person. You know, don’t keep thinking that you’ll always be first. What do you think has been happening over there when you’re not looking?” Park Hye-Young asked.

Park Hye-Young’s face started getting closer to mine. The moment I heard Park Hye-Young’s voice whispering into my ear, I yelled without realizing it.

“You know… Mr. Ki-Young is better than I thought,” Park Hye-Young commented.

“S-Stop lying!” I yelled.

“Oh my, looks like I’ve been caught.”

Tears started filling my eyes. I wanted to say something to deny her, but I felt like something kept blocking my throat.

Park Hye-Young was right. I was abandoned by my parents and my older sisters. The friends that I spent time with and the people that I liked had all abandoned me. Maybe I was the type that people easily got tired of. I always made mistakes and had trouble speaking properly. Getting bullied was part of my daily life and being alone became more comfortable than being with others.

Still…

'Oppa isn't that kind of person.'

He was a bit different from the others. Compared to the people that I met, his principle was different. Lee Ki-Young told me that I was like family. He told me that I was like his younger sister and that he wanted to cherish me. He cared and looked after me every day and said that even Mr. Deok-Gu felt the same.

Ki-Young oppa told me every day that he cherished me. He always cheered me on by saying that I could do better even when I made mistakes. Even when I asked stupid questions, he always answered with a smile and quietly watched over me.

"Y-You're wrong," I told Park Hye-Young.

"That's just wishful thinking. Honestly, something like that can happen. I'll give you a warning, little sis. If there's something you want, it's better to get what you want as soon as possible before you get abandoned. If not, everything will be taken away from you," Park Hye-Young explained.

"P-P-Please stop. D-Don't talk about oppa…"

"No," she said, interrupting me.

The moment I saw a smirk on her face, I felt something pushing my shoulder, and naturally, my body moved back. When I looked back after I landed on my rear, all I saw was Park Hye-Young's back walking farther away from me. At the same time, I heard voices everywhere.

"She deserves it," a survivor commented.

“What happened?”

“I think our innocent, little Miss Ha-Yan is going to get abandoned soon.”

“Stop it, she’ll hear you.”

“Stop what? Didn’t you hear what just happened? She’ll be alone again soon enough… I wonder who she’s going to go to next. Oh! I don’t think there’s anyone she can go to now. It probably would’ve been best if she stuck with Mr. Seok-Woo… she should have known her place. That’s why she’s alone,” one of the survivors said.

“She’s all alone now.”

‘Impossible.’

There was no way Ki-Young oppa would abandon me. He told me that he would always be by my side, so there was no way he would abandon me. He said I was like family, so there was no way he would abandon me.

‘Are you sure about that?’

However, I could hear Park Hye-Young’s voice inside my head.

“Impossible!” I yelled out.

“What’s going on?” a survivor asked.

“Did she yell just now? I guess she’s really angry now…” another commented.

“I guess her true nature is coming out, heh.”

Impossible. There was no way that Ki-Young oppa would abandon me. He was different from the others. He was warm-hearted and kind.

‘Your older sisters even abandoned you.’

“T-That’s not true.”

‘And your parents abandoned you too.’

“It’s not like that. Ki-Young oppa is different. He’s different.”

I’m sure he was different.

Calming myself down was really difficult. I felt like I couldn’t really breathe. My breathing became more and more rapid and I became confused. My eyes were filled with tears, but they didn’t roll down my cheeks.

I heard people ridiculing me. I didn’t really care about what others said about me, but I needed something a little more different.

My feet were heading towards the place where Ki-Young oppa was.

‘I’ll only need a moment, right? If I tell him that there was something I didn’t understand, I’m sure he’ll come to see me.’

I was certain he would take the time to see me. I felt like I would be able to calm down if I saw his face.

When I continued walking frantically, I heard a voice. The voice belonged to Lee Ji-Hye.

“Please gather for a moment, everyone,” she said.

“Okay,” the people answered.

“Tomorrow when Mr. Hyun-Sung, Deok-Gu, and Ki-Young head outside, they’re planning on choosing a few people from here to take with them. Mr. Hyun-Sung will tell you the details, so when I call out your name, it would be best to prepare,” Lee Ji-Hye explained.

I recalled something about going out to hunt together. It was only natural for me to think that I could use this to spend more time with him. Although I wasn’t sure about how I forgot about that, I would be able to spend more time with him now.

‘What a relief.’

When I turned my head, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Ki-Young oppa behind Lee Ji-Hye.

'Oppa.'

He had a serious face, which was different from his usual face, but I felt like I was calming down. My heart was pounding fast, but my head wasn't hurting and I wasn't feeling dizzy anymore. The frustrating feeling that I felt earlier disappeared as soon as my eyes met his. My face turned red for some reason when I realized that I couldn't understand this feeling.

'He saw me.'

I was certain that stared at me just now.

When people stopped talking amongst themselves, Kim Hyun-Sung quietly opened his mouth.

"First of all, I'm sorry for calling you all here when I know you're all busy. I'm sure you're all aware, but it'll be difficult to try to continue to survive here. Food rations are decreasing by the day and the number of survivors keeps increasing. We have food and water that we obtained from the starting points, but we don't have a lot. I believe there's a need for us to widen our search area a little bit."

"Oh…" was all the people said.

"The number of people that can fight needs to be increased. Of course, I understand that you're all afraid of the monsters. There are those that aren't used to fighting and those that want to remain here. However, we need to start moving. I didn't want to give you bad news, but if we don't do this, then we'll all get killed in the end. That's why we believed that it would be best to consecutively take all of you outside with us," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

After he finished talking, Ki-Young oppa started talking next.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"Yes, I understand what you're afraid of, but there are things that we can obtain only if we fight. I'm sure you all know, but this isn't the same Earth that we once lived on. After seeing the status window, system attributes, and jobs, I'm certain that you all know what that means. Flame," Ki-Young oppa said.

I saw flames rising up from his hand. The people around him widened their eyes at

the sight.

“I’m not exactly sure what happened, but the job that was shown on my status window was a mage. There aren’t a lot of spells that I’m able to cast, and I’m just an ordinary human that’s no different from all of you. I used to run away because I was scared of them and even hid because I didn’t want to encounter the monsters. It was definitely luck at first, but if you face your fears and fight, you’ll be able to obtain a job too. If the group becomes stronger, then all of us can become stronger and in the end, we can all escape this place, but we do need to move a bit independently,” he explained.

“Wooow…”

“As a test, we’ll take two people with us. Miss Ha-Yan,” he called out.

“Oh…”

“And Miss Hye-Young,” Ki-Young oppa called out.

“Yes, I look forward to working with you,” she said.

“We’ll be taking two people for now. Once the two people reach a certain level of stability, we’ll create groups again and take other people. Any questions?” he asked.

“I’d appreciate it if you could explain what your basis is on when selecting people,” a survivor requested.

“Potential, but it’s also to relieve your anxiety,” he answered.

“If we go out to hunt on our own…”

“We don’t want to block your free will, but we don’t recommend doing that,” Ki-Young oppa said.

I heard people talking, but I couldn’t really hear what they were saying. More than that, Park Hye-Young, I saw that woman. I heard that other people were going to go with them, but I never imagined that woman would be going out with them as well.

“Congratulations, unnie,” a survivor said.

“Don’t get hurt,” another said.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung, Ki-Young, and Deok-Gu will be there too, so I think I’ll be fine. I’m a little bit scared, but I need to overcome it. If there are more people that are able to fight, it will be for the better,” Park Hye-Young said.

People surrounded Park Hye-Young and congratulated her, but I wasn’t jealous. But I did feel strange for some reason.

‘Don’t take him away from me.’

When I quickly looked back up at the podium, I saw oppa looking at Park Hye-Young. There was a small smile on his face.

Not only did I keep hearing the voice that I heard earlier, but I started to hyperventilate.

‘You’re the type of person that people easily get tired of.’

Park Hye-Young ran up to the podium and shook everyone’s hands.

‘You’ve been abandoned.’

‘He’ll be taken away from you.’

‘Your older sisters abandoned you too.’

‘Even your parents.’

‘Stop it. Stop it. Stop it.’

‘In the end, you’ll… ’

‘Stop… ’

‘Abandoned… ’

‘I don’t like it.’

The moment Ki-Young oppa held Park Hye-Young’s hand, I felt something collapse inside me.

CHAPTER 16
WHEN FIVE PEOPLE GATHER THERE'S ALWAYS ONE PERSON THAT'S TRASH (1)

'Not bad.'

Showing them my magic wasn't a bad choice. Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu were definitely strong, but it was difficult to tell whether their power came from the system or if they were originally strong.

Even if I told them that they would be able to obtain new powers right away, it was obvious they wouldn't really feel it even if Park Deok-Gu held up a shield. Compared to that, magic was a bit different.

A ball of flame appeared in the air. It completely destroyed all common sense and even after seeing with their own eyes, it was a sight that was difficult to believe. This was the best method to try and pull them out from the cave they were curled up in.

Kim Hyun-Sung mumbled while looking at the people that were quietly expressing their excitement.

"It's a success.'

"I'm sure it's just a small change. People that don't want to fight will still be afraid… there may even be people that'll push themselves to their limits at the thought of obtaining new power," I explained.

"Still, it's better than dying from starvation, hyung-nim," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"Yeah, probably," I said.

I saw Park Hye-Young walking up to the podium and getting congratulated by the other survivors.

"If Miss Hye-Young and Miss Ha-Yan return successfully, I'm sure their development

will accelerate," I told them.

That's how important this expedition was to Kim Hyun-Sung. We still didn't know how to proceed with attacking this dungeon, but it was right to think that Kim Hyun-Sung's power alone wasn't enough. His current stats were a little bit better than Park Deok-Gu's. Kim Hyun-Sung's magic stats were high, but he wasn't strong enough to go up against a group of monsters.

Since Kim Hyun-Sung was responsible for many things, I'm sure he wanted the others to at least take care of the monsters that were around the shelter.

'It's all thanks to his unnecessary sense of responsibility.'

If it wasn't for that, he would have been able to take a step forward long ago.

While I was thinking about something else, Park Hye-Young grabbed Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and my hand in order.

"I look forward to working with you," she said.

"Likewise," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I admit that she was a friendly person. As I looked at her while she displayed a fake smile, Park Hye-Young touched the back of my hand and sent me a signal. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan was more important than her.

When I turned my head, I saw Jung Ha-Yan quietly staring at me.

'What.'

Her expression was a bit different from the expressions I saw from her before. The moment I saw Jung Ha-Yan look at Park Hye-Young in a calm way, it was only for a moment, but I felt goosebumps on my back.

'Damn it.'

In an instant, I had goosebumps all over my body.

'What was that just now?'

“Hyung-nim, are you not feeling well? You’re sweating…” Park Deok-Gu pointed out.

“I’m not feeling well…” I said.

“We’re going out on a hunt tomorrow, so you should rest today. It’s because you’ve been studying every day,” he said

“I got it,” I told him.

“Tsk, as if people don’t already know that you’re a teacher… have you not been eating enough food lately? I-I’m not particularly worried about you, hyung-nim, but… you can take my share…” Park Deok-Gu offered.

I wasn’t interested in his mumbling. I quickly turned my head and looked at Jung Ha-Yan again. She now had the same eyes that she usually had.

‘Am I hallucinating?’ was what I thought, but I was certain that I didn’t imagine just imagine what I saw just now. Jung Ha-Yan smiled like a fool as she looked in my way.

‘What the… ’

Something was wrong. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I felt uneasy that I had to gulp.

* * *

“I’ll say it once more. Mr. Deok-Gu will be in the front and behind him will be Mr. Hyun-Sung and Miss Hye-Young. Miss Ha-Yan and I will follow behind. The fight is simple. The shield will be used to block the front and I’ll guard the back. Currently, there aren’t a lot of monsters around the shelter, so after we walk forward a bit, we’ll begin the hunt. Any questions?” I asked.

“No,” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Nothing.”

“Same here.”

“No, nothing…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

I felt like I went over the plan a few times already. The plan was different compared to when it was just me, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Hyun-Sung.

This hunt will determine how important the expedition was to Kim Hyun-Sung.

Adding two members to the group wasn’t the only thing we did. Depending on how successful this hunt was, it would change the mindset of the group that was inside the shelter. If everyone returned alive, then the survivors inside the shelter would have more confidence in going outside to hunt. But if something untoward happens, it may complicate things.

There was also a hidden plan involved in gathering more members.

‘I’m sure Kim Hyun-Sung wants to get some brownie points.’

His goal and my goal were pretty similar. It was to obtain Jung Ha-Yan. Of course, I wasn’t approaching her because I had feelings for her. His goal was to become friends with strong people for the predetermined future.

‘Jung Ha-Yan.’

To sum things up, it was returning back to base safely and being friends with the mage that had the legendary rank talent.

There was really no reason to oppose the arrangement and no reason to feel nervous.

‘I need to keep an eye on the situation.’

Jung Ha-Yan’s eyes that I saw back then. It would have been great if I was hallucinating, but I felt like there was a need for me to watch her from afar.

“Wouldn’t it be better to have Miss Ha-Yan stand on the inner side? Being in the same position as you hyung-nim is…” Park Deok-Gu suggested.

“No, we’ll stay like this. This is the best position,” I said, cutting him off.

“Well, if you say so hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung is stronger than we think. It’s ideal to hunt the monsters from the front, so we’ll have Ha-Yan in the back and leave Mr. Hyun-Sung as insurance. As long as we’re not surrounded, this will be the most effective formation for us to use,” I explained.

“Yes, he’s right,” Kim Hyun-Sung said in agreement. I felt like I got some brownie points, and it felt good.

Kim Hyun-Sung spoke quietly while looking at Jung Ha-Yan, who looked slightly down.

“You don’t have to worry so much,” he said, comforting her.

“Excuse me? Oh… thank you,” she said.

“So, I can just have a nice time with Mr. Ki-Young, right?” Park Hye-Young asked.

“You just need to support Mr. Ki-Young, so I think a spear will be a good weapon,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“Okay, got it,” she said.

“Then let’s head out. We’ll be taking the path we mentioned earlier…”

“W-Which way was that…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I’ll tell him,” I said.

I had the geography of this place in my head.

Park Deok-Gu looked at me with a thankful look. I wasn’t sure if he didn’t have an interest in the surroundings in the first place or if he relied on me too much, but he seemed like he was too lazy to use his head. Seeing him stand up while holding up a huge wooden shield made him look very reliable. To the point that if I were to only look at their outer appearance, I would give more points to Park Deok-Gu than Kim Hyun-Sung, despite the fact that his only gear was the loose leather armor that I made for him and the shield he picked up from the starting point.

“Shall we head out then?” I asked.

“Let’s go,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

All of us gave a brief nod.

Both Park Hye-Young and Jung Ha-Yan looked a bit nervous. It was only natural for them to feel that way since they were going to encounter the same monsters they saw at the starting point. I spoke words of comfort to Park Hye-Young, who was next to me.

“There’s no need to worry so much.”

“Was it obvious?” she asked.

“The monsters won’t charge in all at once as they did back at the starting point. We also cleaned up this area recently and since Deok-Gu will be blocking the monsters from the front, all we have to do is attack them with our spears. It might be a little bit scary, but I’m sure you can do it,” I explained.

“You’re more caring than I thought,” she commented.

I had no choice but to care.

‘If you start panicking, then we’ll all die.’

No one knew what was going to happen during a fight. I may even get blindly stabbed by that woman.

When I slightly turned my head, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung talking to Jung Ha-Yan. It seemed like he was helping her with different things, but Jung Ha-Yan looked like she wasn’t interested in him. She either had her head down and ignored him or gave him short answers, making the communication between them difficult. It reminded me of the time when I had to be patient in order to become closer to Jung Ha-Yan.

When I smiled as our eyes met, Jung Ha-Yan nodded with a very happy expression. Thinking that I at least had the upper hand when it came to my relationship with her, I felt good.

“Oh my, are you cheating on me? I thought I was your partner,” Park Hye-Young said.

“I was just checking the back. Please refrain from small talk while we’re moving…” I warned her.

“Yes, I know,” she answered.

Then…

“It’s a monster, please be ready,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Got it,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

I heard Kim Hyun-Sung’s voice from behind me and Park Deok-Gu, who was in the front, mumbled. He must still be nervous because I saw his body becoming tense.

“While Mr. Deok-Gu is blocking the monster, you can kill the monster, Miss Hye-Young. Mr. Ki-Young will prepare for anything that can happen,” I told them.

They nodded. Park Hye-Young, who looked relaxed, was now filled with a bit of fear and anxiety. Even though we were there with her, Park Hye-Young was the one that had to deal the killing blow. It would be strange if she didn’t feel any fear.

I heard a voice from our left.

“Deok-Gu, there’s going to be a monster on the left side,” I said.

“I know hyung-nim,” he said.

Park Deok-Gu jumped in. He immediately turned into a corner and pushed the monster using his shield.

Crack!

With that sound, the monster became stuck between a wall and his shield. Park Hye-Young did follow me inside, but she still looked like she was panicking.

“Kyahhh!”

“Damn it… its face looks annoying as usual,” Park Deok-Gu commented.

“What are you doing?” I asked Park Hye-Young.

Her arms and legs were shaking and I knew exactly the type of situation she was in. It was already a good thing that she didn't pee on herself.

"H-How," she said.

"Stab it," I told her.

"Hey, hurry up and kill it. I can't hold it for much longer," Park Deok-Gu warned.

"Oh…"

The relaxed side that she had been showing so far was nowhere to be seen. Her eyes looked determined, but it seemed like her body wasn't listening to her. She probably didn't know why she was acting this way.

'You're stupid… acting all tough.'

I lightly grabbed Park Hye-Young's arm from behind her. When I grabbed her trembling hands that were holding onto the spear, her trembling died down. And then, I whispered into her ear. We weren't in a situation where I could yell at her and I thought that quietly talking to her was more effective than yelling at her.

"If you do this again next time, then we're all dead. Got it?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Put your strength into your arms," I instructed her.

"……"

I felt her put her strength into her arms.

When she slowly stabbed the body of the monster that Park Deok-Gu was blocking, her arm followed the spear. Even though I was the one that was stabbing it, she could probably feel the movement.

Rip!

With that sound, unknown liquids squirted out. The shock and disgust must've caught on to Park Hye-Young because she tried to let go of the spear, but I tightened

my grip around her arms.

“It’s not dead yet, so don’t let go,” I told her.

“Gahhhh!”

The monster was struggling, and I wasn’t sure whether it was in pain or if it was mad, but it was trying to scratch Park Deok-Gu, who was blocking it.

While holding Park Hye-Young’s hands from above again, I stabbed the monster. As always, the feedback wasn’t that great.

“Think of it as meat,” I said.

“Okay, okay,” she said.

Rip!

Crack!

We continued to stab it. The monster had already stopped moving, but this was the best method to get someone to adapt to the brutality of killings. Moments later, Park Deok-Gu slightly moved his shield and the monster fell on the ground. I also let go of Park Hye-Young’s hands.

The monster naturally fell apart, but despite that, Park Hye-Young kept stabbing the monster. I didn’t know if she did it in order to escape from her fear, but while biting her lips, she tightened her grip around the spear.

‘I understand that feeling.’

The feeling of taking a life would certainly be unfamiliar to anyone. It didn’t matter whether their opponent was a monster or not.

The horrifying sound continued for a long time. Eventually, I heard the sound of Park Hye-Young panting in exhaustion. It was natural for her to have all sorts of thoughts at this moment. As I approached Park Hye-Young who had collapsed to the ground, I carefully opened my mouth.

“Good job.”

I didn’t hear her answer.

CHAPTER 17
WHEN FIVE PEOPLE GATHER THERE'S ALWAYS ONE PERSON THAT'S TRASH (2)

"Hey, I haven't really seen any monsters today. Don't you agree, hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"It's because Mr. Hyun-Sung has been cleaning around this area, but if not that, then it's possible that they moved to a different area," I told him.

"Are you saying that there are survivors in other areas too?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Who knows…" I said.

Park Deok-Gu mumbled as if he was curious.

It was mere speculation, but it wasn't impossible. Considering how empty this place was, it was possible that there was a big commotion elsewhere and the monsters moved to that area. Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he had a similar thought, but he probably thought that taking Park Hye-Young and Jung Ha-Ya would be too much for them. He most likely had decided that moving without actually knowing the size of their group and location was dangerous.

In the end, Kim Hyun-Sung nodded and then spoke.

"I think it would be best to camp out here tonight."

"Yes, let's do that," I said in agreement.

I somewhat expected it, so it didn't take long to find a location and set up a decent camp. Of course, we didn't have tents, but being in a moderately enclosed space gave us a sense of stability.

"Miss Hye-Young and Mr. Ki-Young will stand watch, then Miss Ha-Yan and I, then Mr. Deok-Gu will be the last to stand watch," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“Is that okay?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes, it’ll be enough,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

He volunteered to go through the trouble, so there was no reason to stop him.

‘First watch isn’t bad.’

Unlike them who had high stamina points, my stats were trash, so I needed a lot of time to rest. Considering Kim Hyun-Sung's stamina and magic stats, it would be nothing for him to stay up for one night.

“You can go in and rest,” I suggested.

“I appreciate your hard work hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“T-Thank you,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

I nodded after listening to what they said. When the remaining members, including Jung Ha-Yan, slowly headed to the inner part of the stone chamber, I was able to properly observe Park Hye-Young.

She looked as if she was in a daze. She pretended like she was fine, but I was certain that she was still tremendously shocked inside. It was only natural for her to be shell-shocked after what she had experienced—the monster’s screech, the fear of dying, stabbing the monster using her own spear—and the sensation of having killed a living being with her own hands.

It was possible that Park Hye-Young had the same feeling she had when she was back at the starting point and was disturbed when she saw the monster’s blood and organs coming out.

There was still a lot of time before we switched with the second group, so it wouldn’t be a bad idea to comfort her with a few words.

“It’s really nothing,” I said.

“Excuse me?” she asked.

“Since we’ve been thrown in here, we’re all going to have to experience it at least

once. It might make you feel better if you think of it as experiencing it a lot sooner than others," I explained.

"I see," she said.

Compared to earlier, she was really out of energy.

"I thought I could do it at first…" Park Hye-Young said.

"I'm sure everyone thinks the same way, but once you get used to it, you'll feel more comfortable," I said, trying to comfort her.

"What was it like for you, Mr. Ki-Young?" she asked me.

"I honestly don't remember. All I could think of was that I could die if I didn't move, so I started recklessly beating a monster with a rock. It was scary, but… I thought it was necessary. My hands and entire body were covered in the monster's organs and brain, so I suffered because of the smell," I answered her.

Do or die was the only thing that was in my head and I was half gambling.

I believed that Park Deok-Gu wasn't going to abandon me and run away. Thus, I thought that it would be best to make the monster move. The situation back then caused pumped my entire body full of adrenaline.

"I… I can't help but laugh at myself for thinking that it would be easy," she said, ridiculing herself.

"Well, you did say something along the lines of helping us out," I added.

I had expectations, so I couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed.

"I wasn't lying about that. I thought I could do well since you called out my name…" she explained.

I thought so too. Her nature and stats weren't bad. I thought I would get something in return for doing her a favor, so I forcefully added one more person to the group, but she ended up being a disappointment.

I guess Park Hye-Young thought our job was easy seeing as how me, Park Deok-Gu,

and Kim Hyun-Sung kept going in and out of the base without any trouble.

I didn't really have a reason to invest in Park Hye-Young. I had Park Deok-Gu, who was trustworthy, Jung Ha-Yan, a mage who I was a bit worried about, and Kim Hyun-Sung, the regressor.

Helping Park Hye-Young was nothing more than insurance, but if she continued being scared like this, then she wouldn't be able to help herself, much less me.

"I was a bit happy when you grabbed me from behind," she said.

Thinking about it now, I remembered how she trembled like an idiot and how I swore frantically, but I didn't have a choice but to nod. "I think I said something harsh because of the chaotic situation… but don't worry about it," I told her.

"Yes, o-of course," she answered, stuttering.

"Also, this is the first and the last time that I'm going to help you. Next time, you'll have to do it on your own," I said.

"Okay…" Park Hye-Young answered weakly.

I saw Park Hye-Young staring at me, to the point that I wasn't sure whether she wanted to have a staring contest or not. There was a long silence. After some time passed, I was about to say something, but I heard a voice from behind me.

"O-Oppa…" Jung Ha-Yan called out.

"Mr. Ki-Young, Miss Hye-Young, it's time for us to switch," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan came outside. I didn't think that so much time had passed since our first watch.

"You're up early. You could've slept in a little longer," I said.

"I woke up from my sleep, so it's fine… we'll wake you up in the morning," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Thank you, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

When I approached Jung Ha-Yan, who was standing a little bit far from Kim Hyun-Sung, and lightly patted her head, I saw her lowering her head and blushing. This was how she usually acted. The way Jung Ha-Yan looked at Park Hye-Young wasn't any different, so I thought that what I saw last time was my misunderstanding.

"Keep up the good work, Ha-Yan," I told her.

"Huh? Oh… okay, oppa!" she answered cheerfully.

Her voice was a bit loud. She looked kind of surprised at what she had done because the way she covered her mouth was kind of cute. After lightly nodding, I headed inside and saw Park Deok-Gu snoring.

"He's sleeping without a care in the world.'

He was blessed to be able to sleep in an environment like this.

Park Hye-Young laid down in the arranged spot, and I took the spot that was located a little bit away from Park Deok-Gu.

I had a lot on my mind for no reason. Like how the group was going to change after this hunt, Kim Hyun-Sung's thought process, and whether there really was a way to escape from this place.

I was referring to the type of tactics and how it was going to be carried out. Jung Ha-Yan had already obtained her job, the truth behind Kim Hyun-Sung's regression, details about what happened in the past, what was going to happen after the tutorial ended, and what kind of relationship I should maintain with Lee Ji-Hye moving forward…

I thought about what I should do if I didn't manage to fall asleep, but it seemed like I was worried for nothing. We walked a lot today, and I was a little bit stressed mentally, so it didn't take long for me to fall asleep.

'What time is it?'

Because of the uncomfortable sleeping spot, I kept waking up in the middle of my sleep.

I heard Park Deok-Gu slowly standing up, so I guess he was heading out to stand watch with Kim Hyun-Sung.

“Sleep well, noonim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“K-Keep up the good work, Mr. Deok-Gu,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

It sounded like they were talking about something, but my eyes closed again. As the voices got quieter, I lost my consciousness again, but I woke up again when I felt something strange on my lips. Something had also grabbed my hand. I immediately tried to get up, but my body wouldn’t move. No, it was more like someone was staring at me.

I heard Jung Ha-Yan’s voice, and she sounded like she was whispering.

“Pl… hu…”

I couldn’t hear her clearly because I wasn’t fully awake. Obviously, I knew who was staring at me.

I became conscious and it went without saying that my sleepiness disappeared.

When I slightly opened my left eye, I saw a black shadow quietly looking down at me. I didn’t know what kind of situation I was in, but I wasn’t stupid enough to get up. I knew that whatever Jung Ha-Yan was whispering right now, she wasn’t saying it to me.

‘What kind of situation am I in?’

Even after trying to close my eyes, I kept hearing sounds. I heard the sound of her body moving, the sound of her clothes rustling, and I even felt something soft on my lips.

“*Ha… ha…*”

‘What’s going on?’

I have never been this confused. I wasn’t sure if she had an unusual habit or if this was the side effect of pushing past her limits, but one thing I was sure of was that she had feelings for me.

"*Haa…*"

Jung Ha-Yan had an excessive amount of feelings for me, so it was only right to let her yell in delight for a while. Becoming close to Jung Ha-Yan was my top priority from the beginning, so it wasn't a bad result, but having a sibling-like relationship was my ideal relationship with her. In the end, this wasn't the situation I wanted to be in.

After some time passed, Jung Ha-Yan moved slightly away from here. I guess she had a hard time falling asleep because I continued hearing rustling sounds from her end. I wasn't sure what she was doing, but when I slightly opened my eyes out of curiosity, I saw Jung Ha-Yan's back as she quietly looked down at Park Hye-Young.

"…"

Jung Ha-Yan was watching Park Hye-Young sleep for a long time. It felt like she was staring at her while staying in one position without moving.

'Is she sleepwalking or something?'

I wasn't sure from when and how things went wrong, but something was definitely wrong. Even after obtaining her job, Jung Ha-Yan hid that fact, and her expression when Park Hye-Young was chosen to go on the expedition with us worried me.

I was certain that there was a reason behind her strange actions back then and right now.

That was when Jung Ha-Yan quickly turned her head—it was only for a moment—but our eyes met. I once experienced this feeling before. Goosebumps rose on my back, but I couldn't put my finger on what exactly caused it.

'Da… '

I instinctively tried to close my eyes, but I couldn't tell whether I got caught or not. No, more than that.

'I'm the one that's scared, right?'

I didn't know why, but I couldn't help but cower. Was it the influence of her magic?

Or was it because of her so-called ‘killing intent’ shown in those comics?

I wasn’t sure of the reason, but I had seen this side of Jung Ha-Yan before. It felt like I was being constricted.

Seeing as how she hadn't said anything, I assumed she hadn't realized the fact that I was awake, but something was strange because the surroundings suddenly became quiet to the point that it was scary.

‘Damn it… ’

I just couldn’t understand what was happening. I couldn’t hear the rustling sounds, the sound of her breathing, and the sound of her clothes brushing against something. I couldn’t hear them anymore.

I did hear Park Hye-Young’s intermittent breathing, but it wasn’t a sound that was coming from Jung Ha-Yan’s mouth.

I tried to go back to sleep, but the problem was that I couldn’t. I felt someone quietly lying down not too far from me.

“…”

“…”

It was probably Jung Ha-Yan.

One second felt like one minute.

I wasn’t sure how much time had passed and I wasn’t sure if it was a good thing or a bad thing, but I heard someone’s voice from outside.

“It’s time to wake up.”

CHAPTER 18
WHEN FIVE PEOPLE GATHER THERE'S ALWAYS ONE PERSON THAT'S TRASH (3)

This was the first time I felt happy being woken up.

"Okay, I'm up." Park Hye-Young was the first to wake up.

After her, I heard Jung Ha-Yan rustling around.

While I was thinking about when it would be a good time to wake up, I felt someone tapping my shoulder.

"Hyung-nim," Deok-Gu called out.

'Nice, Park Deok-Gu.'

The timing wasn't that bad.

I didn't know if I was suddenly feeling tired because I couldn't sleep, but I slightly opened my eyes and stood up.

"Is it already time to wake up?" I asked.

"It looks like we're planning on moving earlier than usual today. After we move in a little, we'll complete the hunt and return to the shelter," Deok-Gu explained.

"Sounds good to me," I commented.

I purposely didn't look at Jung Ha-Yan, but I knew that avoiding her would simply make things more awkward. When I slightly glanced over at her, I saw her smiling brightly at me. Compared to yesterday, she was a totally different person today.

'Which one is the real her?'

I couldn't tell whether the expression she had now was the *real* her or was the expression I saw last night belonged to the *real* her. For now, there was a need for me to cool my head off, so after showing her a small smile, I immediately stood up.

'I'm exhausted.'

My mind felt foggy because I didn't get that much sleep last night.

When I walked outside, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung talking while looking at me.

"You look tired."

"A little bit, but I'm okay," I said.

"I think it'll be best if we walk in a little farther today. Is that okay with you?" he asked.

"I don't think it's a bad idea since there aren't that many monsters around. I'm a bit worried about the others back at the shelter, but if there aren't that many monsters, I think we'll be fine. However, if there happens to be more of them than we thought…" I explained.

"Yes, I'll make sure that we'll be able to withdraw right away," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

It was a reasonable decision.

"Anyways, which side…" I said.

"Last night, I briefly checked the left road and it didn't seem any different from this place," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

Not only was he part of the second group to keep watch, but he even went exploring on his own.

"You did well," I said, complimenting him.

If there were workers that worked as hard as him, then it would make people like me happy. I thought that maybe there would be something on the right side, but it was too early to judge.

“Miss Hye-Young and Miss Ha-Yan…”

“I’m ready too,” Park Hye-Young said.

“We’ll go with the same formation as yesterday, but if we find a monster, Miss Ha-Yan will take Miss Hye-Young’s place. Now, let’s head out,” I said.

“Okay.”

It felt like it was going to be a slightly tiring journey.

First of all, Jung Ha-Yan’s presence was what I was most worried about. I didn’t know what was going on, but her recent actions were quite unusual. I couldn’t really explain it with words, but anyone would think that it was strange. She was very different from what I imagined. It was not like I couldn’t make an assumption, but I couldn’t help but feel a bit puzzled, so I needed to find the reason first.

‘Jealously?’

The reason couldn’t be jealousy since Jung Ha-Yan, and I haven’t really spent a lot of time together. I knew that you couldn’t measure one’s relationship based on how much time they’ve spent together, but it was an undeniable fact that time spent together was important.

Of course, Jung Ha-Yan and I were a special case. We weren’t at a cafe or a restaurant.

If I had to give an example, it felt like one of those B-movies where the man and the woman in crisis fell in love with each other within a short period of time. It was possible that the feelings she had for me were similar to that.

Jung Ha-Yan’s past suddenly came to mind. If I thought about her past, then I was sure that I would be able to come up with a reasonable conclusion.

Jung Ha-Yan’s parents were long dead and it had been a while since she lost contact with her older sisters. If she really believed that her family abandoned her, then I could understand her wanting to rely on me more since the environment that surrounded her hadn’t been nice to her.

'It's a simple deduction.'

But for some reason, I became a rope that she could rely on. I was sure I became someone that was always nice to her, trusted her, and a person she could rely on. Thus, maybe that feeling went beyond infatuation and had turned into an obsession. What I was aiming for from the start was becoming her mental breakwater since attracting someone that had an empty heart was easy.

'Should I test it out?'

It was old-fashioned, but it was worth a try.

While walking side by side, I lightly pulled Park Hye-Young's shoulder and slowly opened my mouth.

"Careful."

"Oh… okay," she said.

Park Hye-Young looked kind of nervous. I guess she thought that I helped her from almost tripping over a rock. She seemed like she wanted to thank me, but this wasn't the reaction that I wanted from her.

I peeked sideways to look at Jung Ha-Yan's eyes and of course, I saw her staring straight at Park Hye-Young.

Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deo-Gu didn't look like they were paying attention, but perhaps it was because of my attribute's effect, I could clearly decipher the emotion in Jung Ha-Yan's eyes that was difficult to describe with words.

'I can use this.'

The hostility she was feeling wasn't against me. It was a bit too much to consider it ordinary jealousy, but after thinking about her nature, her jealousy was within the range where it was possible to fix it. By using the carrot and stick approach, Jung Ha-Yan would become a loyal family member that would be willing to throw herself to me.

As I walked while thinking about different things, it felt like we had been walking for a while.

“I think we’re almost there. Let’s start moving a bit cautiously,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“Ahem, got it, bro,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

I guess this was the area that Kim Hyun-Sung explored last night.

As expected, the smell was different from the previous area, making it seem as if the monster’s unique odor was everywhere. But more than that, what caught my attention was the faint magic that could be felt from far away. I couldn’t tell what kind it was, but it was definitely something different. It was possible that this was what Kim Hyun-Sung wanted.

“I can feel something,” I said.

“What are you talking about? Hyung-nim, do you see the monsters?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I can feel faint magic ahead of us. I’m not really sure what it is, but… anyways…” I answered.

“It’s frustrating since I don’t have any magic. Hey, bro, are you able to feel it?” Park Deok-Gu asked Kim Hyun-Sung.

“I’m not sure either, but since Mr. Ki-Young is a mage, I’m sure he's a bit more used to using his extrasensory senses. I don’t think it’s a bad idea to check it out since there could be a hint about how to capture this place,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

Kim Hyun-Sung definitely didn’t have any talent in acting.

I think the identity of the faint magic had something to do with attacking the dungeon.

“Well, it’s on the way anyway and since it’s better to be safe than sorry, I’ll go first,” Park Deok-Gu offered.

“Careful,” I said.

There wasn’t a need to be careful. If Kim Hyun-Sung felt that something was off from the start, then he wouldn’t just standstill. When we carefully started moving, I could

already see where that faint magic was coming from.

'Stairs.'

"The stairs lead downstairs," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

As he mentioned, the stairs led downstairs and I was finally able to see how we were supposed to enter this dungeon.

When I saw Kim Hyun-Sung nodding, it seemed like he believed that the contrived setup was convincing. It was absurd, but it wouldn't hurt to go along with it.

"It's probably an obvious setup, but do you think that the difficulty level will increase the more we go down? I think it may have something to do with capturing the dungeon," I said.

"Hm, is that so hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I'm not sure, but it's a possibility because when we were at the starting point, there weren't any hints related to strategy. It's not very convincing to just throw some monsters in an area this big and then tell us to capture dungeons, so there's a good chance that going down here is the start. I'm not sure what's going on, but I'm sure we will find more hints than this place," I explained.

Kim Hyun-Sung nodded after hearing my explanation.

"I agree with you," he said.

'Bingo.'

"It'll be difficult to go right now, so let's keep this place in mind and go downstairs next time since we didn't come here today to capture it. If we go underground, there may be something that could help us there, but there could also be different types of monsters for us to fight," he said.

"I don't think I'll like it if there are monsters more annoying than the current one," Park Deok-Gu commented.

I agree.

Anyways, Kim Hyun-Sung succeeded in naturally informing us about the underground entrance, so he may think that doing this was a big achievement.

However, the important thing right now was Jung Ha-Yan and Park Hye-Young's growth. We also needed to prepare people that could fight before going down there.

"The path?" Park Deok-Gu started.

"I have a general idea in my head," I said.

"Then, do we just need to find monsters with this place as the center?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I think that's the best way, so let's start from an area a bit farther away from here," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

"Got it, bro," Park Deok-Gu said.

Even if we didn't keep an eye out like we did yesterday, we were able to encounter one nearby because it seemed like they were slightly spread apart with this place as the center. There were three monsters close by.

When I glanced at Kim Hyun-Sung, I saw him nodding.

"Once Mr. Deok-Gu herds two of the monsters, Mr. Ki-Young can quickly take one and I'll take the other. Then, we'll use the remaining monster as teaching material. Miss Hye-Young and Miss Ha-Yan, please stand in a similar position as Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung instructed them.

"Okay," they answered.

"Got it," Park Deok-Gu said.

After keeping my mouth closed, Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung jumped out first. I guess he was trying to let Park Deok-Gu take aggro because I saw him letting Park Deok-Gu go first. While standing between the nervous Jung Ha-Yan and Park Hye-Young, I started running as well.

I saw Park Deok-Gu pushing one monster with his shield and using his leather-wrapped arm to push the other monster. With a relaxed look, Kim Hyun-Sung

succeeded in charging towards one of the monsters and cutting off its arm.

'He's really fast.'

I expected him to be somewhat fast since his agility stat was high, but he was faster than I had imagined. During that time, I focused a small amount of magic on the tip of my spear and stabbed the monster that Park Deok-Gu was holding.

Rip! With that sound, blood splattered everywhere, but I didn't have the luxury to care.

'It's not dead yet.'

When I tried to stab it again with my spear, Park Hye-Young stabbed it as if she was trying to help.

'Not bad.'

First of all, the most important thing was having the will that you could do it.

There was no need for me to look over at Kim Hyun-Sung's side because he was probably fighting the monster without using his full strength in order to avoid suspicion.

We were going to use the last monster as teaching material.

Before Park Deok-Gu could move to capture the monster, Park Hye-Young, who seemed a bit excited, started stabbing it with her spear.

"Dumb move.'

It was a dumb move no matter how you looked at it.

As expected, her spear missed and the remaining monster escaped Park Deok-Gu's reach.

"Oh! I-I'm sor…"

"Da…"

When there were five people in a group, one of them was bound to be trash.

“Deok-Gu,” I called out.

I heard this quote from somewhere and it never failed me since then.

“Kyahhh!!” Park Hye-Young screamed.

‘This damn bitch!’

CHAPTER 19
WHEN FIVE PEOPLE GATHER THERE'S ALWAYS ONE PERSON THAT'S TRASH (4)

"Kyahhh!" Park Hye-Young screamed.

Of course, Park Hye-Young couldn't help but scream since the monster was charging at her with its mouth opened voraciously. If she didn't attack with her spear from the start, she wouldn't have gotten the aggro from the monster.

The monster's stats weren't that high and if she watched the situation calmly, she would know that Park Deok-Gu would be able to block the monster that was charging at her. However, instead of calmly watching the situation, the damn Park Hye-Young chose to let her fear get the better of her.

"Damn it!"

As if Park Hye-Young had planned this, the situation got worse.

The monsters were sensitive to noises and although they may not be able to hear ordinary conversations from far away, a loud scream will definitely let them know that we were here. The monsters nearby may start coming this way.

Kim Hyun-Sung must've thought the same thing because after cutting off the head of the monster he was fighting, he stabbed the chest of the monster that Park Deok-Gu was holding. Even though he was a bit faster than an average human, he probably realized that the situation was turning bad and that he didn't have the luxury to worry about keeping the last monster alive as teaching material.

I saw the monster trembling, but that wasn't the problem right now.

"We have to leave this place. Now," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Damn it…" I commented.

“I-I’m sor…”

“Mr. Ki-Young, please take care of Miss Hye-Young and Miss Ha-Yan… if something happens, we’ll have Mr. Deok-Gu clear the road for us,” he explained.

“Hey bro, what are you going to do?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I’ll grab the monsters’ attention, so if you leave a trail, I’ll go and find you. Rather than heading straight to the shelter, I think taking a slight detour would be the best, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

I nodded in agreement.

If the monsters that were focused on us followed us back to the shelter, then it wouldn’t be any different from taking them to a buffet.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was trying his best to resolve this situation, but his expression didn’t look so good. Even if he was a regressor, his body was still a growing rookie. I was sure that he would be able to deal with them to some extent, but if more monsters showed up, then it would be difficult to deal with them in an enclosed space.

“Hyung-nim, which way…” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We’re going to go around a bit,” I answered.

“G-Got it,” he said, stuttering.

Park Hye-Young must have realized by now what kind of mistake she made because she started looking this way with a pale face. She realized that if she did something wrong, there would come a time when she would really start screaming in full force.

“Get up,” I told her.

“Okay, okay…” she answered weakly.

“Stick to this side and run,” I instructed Park Hye-Young.

“G-Got it.”

Jung Ha-Yan didn't say anything, but she was looking around absent-mindedly as if she was thinking about something.

"Ha-Yan," I called out.

"Ah… Yes! Oppa," she answered.

She didn't seem like she was scared.

Thinking about it now, the image of Jung Ha-Yan becoming an archmage in the future popped into my head. As a mage, if we ran into a situation that we were unable to handle, I was sure that she would be able to help us.

'There's a good chance that she may survive.'

We would definitely go back alive.

"Good luck," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"You be careful now, bro," Park Deok-Gu told him.

"I'll be fine."

Park Deok-Gu immediately grabbed his shield and started running. Park Hye-Young followed behind us with a horrified look on her face.

I was instantly filled with frustration, but I couldn't nag her about it here. Instead, I started reciting a spell. I started building a tower using my mana and although it was a small amount, this magic would be able to save us once during a moment of crisis.

"Are you able to recite it while running hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I'm getting a headache so stop talking to me," I told him.

Concentrating on the spell was difficult. While my hands and feet were moving, I needed to think about something totally different in my head, which was difficult to visualize, to begin with.

'This is hard… '

“I, hope…” I recited.

The mana tower that I was trying to build kept crumbling down. It was because I couldn’t concentrate. My head felt like it was going to explode because my brain was being overloaded.

‘Slowly, one by one.’

I might succeed if I recited while thinking that there was nothing around me, so I slowly started building my mana again.

We haven’t encountered the monsters yet anyways, so there was more than enough time for me to recite the spell.

“Lord, I, hope, my voice, answer, burn the enemies, give power, to do that,” I recited.

The chant was bound to be lengthy and even though it was a frustrating spell, the spell that was engraved in my head took form in my hand. The ball of fire that appeared in my hand was as big as a person’s head.

“Wow, that’s amazing! When did you manage to learn that?!” Park Deok-Gu asked excitedly.

“Stop talking to me, Deok-Gu. I’m having a hard time concentrating,” I warned him.

I needed to repair and balance the mana tower that was constantly trembling so that it wouldn't collapse.

‘How complicated.’

In cartoons, animations, and novels, they made it seem like magic was an extremely easy skill to use and master, but after using it myself, I felt like my head was going to break. It was to the point where I was wondering whether intelligence might be a more important prerequisite than magic in becoming a mage.

“Where to go next?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Left,” I said.

I couldn’t help but be filled with frustration since I still had to tell Park Deok-Gu

where to go in such a critical situation.

“Gahhhhh!”

I heard the sound of monsters from far away, but they must still be far from us because I couldn’t tell how many they were.

“How many?” I asked.

“About two,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

“By yourself,” I said.

“I’ll try, hyung-nim,” he said.

“It doesn’t matter if you don’t kill them. Just clear the road,” I ordered him.

“Leave it to me,” he said, confidently.

Crack! Rip!

It wasn’t surprising that Park Deok-Gu looked reliable right now as I watched him continuously running in front of me. I couldn’t help but compare him to a tank.

“Next!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

“Right,” I said.

“Gahhhhh!”

“How many?” I asked.

“There’s too many to count…” Park Deok-Gu answered.

I immediately extended my arm out.

“Fire ball.”

The fire ball that had been floating about in my hand stopped, then it flew in a straight line. The recoil was unexpectedly strong. Perhaps it was because of the wind

pressure, but my hand was forced up in the air for a moment. Even after the fire ball left my hand, I didn't stop operating the spell in my head. It was because I worked hard in reciting the spell, so I didn't want it to start flying in the wrong direction.

Boom!

The fire ball struck one of the monsters and an explosion reverberated afterward, releasing heat and fire that spread everywhere. The shockwave from the explosion caused the wind to blow in this way too.

Of course, Park Deok-Gu stood in front of us and blocked it.

When the monsters were either forced to a corner amidst their escape or were enveloped by the flame, they collapsed as they screeched. When Park Deok-Gu saw that, he looked back at me with a surprised expression.

It was a small space and since it was crowded, they luckily got hit, but Park Deok-Gu was surprised by the aftermath of the magic that spread around us.

"Wow… hyung-nim…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"*Whoo… whoo…*"

The effects of the magic escaping from my body caused my legs to start shaking, but we had to clear the path no matter what.

"Again."

That was when I felt that something was off.

"Oh!"

Park Deok-Gu carelessly turned around and then looked at me in surprise.

'Jung Ha-Yan, Park Hye-Young.'

They got separated from us.

"Since when… did you not see them?" I asked Park Deok-Gu.

“I-I definitely saw them f-following us a moment ago…” he answered.

“Hey.”

I was going to let out my frustration, but I decided to suppress my desire to swear at him since this was my fault.

Since I was reciting the spell in my head, I did not notice the fact that they got separated from us. The fact that Park Deok-Gu also didn’t know about this was kind of unexpected, but I was certain that they weren’t that far behind since they were just following us earlier.

The important question was whether they knew the path. If it was Jung Ha-Yan, she may have memorized it, but there was no way that troll Park Hye-Young would memorize the way because I was sure that following us alone was already hard enough for her.

“W-What… I-I’m sorr…”

“It’s not your fault, Deok-Gu. Damn it, I should’ve paid more attention,” I told him.

“What should we do now?” he asked.

That was what I wanted to ask myself.

If Park Hye-Young was the only person that got left behind, then I would have abandoned her, but the problem was that Jung Ha-Yan was with her.

She was the lottery ticket that was guaranteed to win, so if I recklessly lost her at a place like this, I wouldn’t even be able to laugh it off.

I didn’t like to gamble, but if I had to do something drastic, then I would do it.

“I’m sure they’re still alive,” I said.

“Th, then.”

“If they’re smart, they would leave a mark that we would be able to recognize. Let’s go back,” I suggested.

“Good thinking, hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

There was a good chance that Kim Hyun-Sung was taking care of the monsters that were following us, but the problem was the monsters from different directions.

Reciting another spell would be difficult. I already used up the majority of my mana, but I should be able to cast another one if I squeezed out every ounce of mana left in my body.

“Do you remember when we lost them?” I asked.

“I-I think they were still with us when we were fighting the two monsters. I-I definitely saw them… I didn’t even hear them scream…” he said.

I also couldn’t remember, but even when I was reciting the spell, I remember them following us. I guess they disappeared while I was maintaining my magic.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“Got it.”

I was a bit shocked at first, but the more I thought about it, the more strange it felt. Park Deok-Gu was slow-witted, but he wasn’t so dumb that he wouldn’t notice the abrupt disappearance of two people. I was the same.

Park Deok-Gu’s agility stat wasn’t that high to begin with and although Jung Ha-Yan might struggle she could still keep up. As for Park Hye-Young, she would also struggle, but it wasn’t to the point that she couldn’t keep up.

I didn’t think that the monsters caught them either. I thought maybe they fell into a trap within this dungeon, but the possibility of that was low since we had already passed through this path once. If there were traps within this region, then Kim Hyun-Sung would have mentioned it.

I suddenly recalled the look that Jung Ha-Yan gave Park Hye-Young.

‘I’m sure that’s not the case.’

It was too early for me to judge, but if Jung Ha-Yan wanted to be away from us, then I could kind of understand.

I didn't know what kind of spell she recited, but while I was focusing on mine, there was a possibility that I wouldn't have noticed if she was reciting her own spell. I didn't have the luxury to maintain my spell and observe the situation around us after all.

Park Deok-Gu didn't have magic, to begin with, so no matter what Jung Ha-Yan did, I was sure that he wouldn't notice. In addition, since Kim Hyun-Sung was far from us, he didn't count.

I didn't want to have this thought, but I thought that maybe she wanted to create a situation where she was alone with Park Hye-Young.

'The question is why?'

I didn't want to have bad thoughts, but I couldn't help but feel anxious.

While I was running with Park Deok-Gu, I started to feel a faint amount of magic, just like the time when we discovered the entrance of the dungeon downstairs.

'Da… '

"Deok-Gu, hurry," I said.

"Did something happen?" he asked.

It was a simple assumption, but the magic that I was able to faintly feel seemed to prove that my assumption was true.

CHAPTER 20
ACCIDENT

“Miss Hye-Young?” Lee Ji-Hye called out.

“Yes, Miss Ji-Hye. I’m listening,” I answered.

“Please go see Mr. Ki-Young,” she told me.

“Excuse me?”

“I think it’s best to accommodate people like Mr. Ki-Young with many different things and I’m not just talking about today, but from now on,” she explained.

“I don’t really understand what…”

“I’ll leave it up to your imagination, so all you have to do is do the tasks that you think you can do. It doesn’t matter if you’re there to just talk to him or… oh! Being his bed warmer isn’t a bad idea as well,” Lee Ji-Hye explained.

“…”

“The last part was a joke, but I don’t think it’s a bad idea for you to give it a serious thought… since the situation here isn’t that great. There’s nothing for us to forage and eat here, and we only have a limited amount of people who can go out to hunt. Mr. Hyun-Sung has been killing the monsters around the base periodically, but we don’t know what’s going to happen in the future. The reality is that no one can guarantee anything. We need to think of the possibility that the people who go out to hunt may not come back, and we need to be prepared for whatever might happen in the future. Don’t you agree?” she asked.

“…”

“All I’m saying is that it’s not such a bad idea to keep a connection with a capable man. People like us need to have insurance, don’t you think? Who knows? If things work out well, you may get special treatment like Miss Jung Ha-Yan…” Lee Ji-Hye

explained.

“I understand,” Park Hye-Young said.

“Oh! And I heard that they’re going to take Miss Ha-Yan on their next hunt, so it wouldn’t be such a bad idea if you went with them, right?” she asked.

“I appreciate you telling me all these things, but… is there a reason why you’re doing me this favor?” Park Hye-Young asked.

“Well, I’m just simply doing you a favor. However, I’m telling you this because I would like for you to help me if things work out well. You see, I don’t exactly enjoy gambling,” she answered.

* * *

‘Damn bitch.’

That damn Lee Ji-Hye. I kept cursing Lee Ji-Hye in my head, but nothing changed since I was the one that made the mistake. No, I was the one that made the decision from the start. Knowing that I was going to be the guinea pig, I agreed to Lee Ji-Hye’s words and followed Lee Ki-Young.

Our journey had just started and I already made a stupid mistake. I decided to make up for it.

I attacked with my spear to show that I was a useful person, but that was a big mistake as well. In addition, the fact that I unknowingly screamed was a bigger mistake.

I heard Lee Ki-Young and Park Deok-Gu in front of me. Lee Ki-Young was consistently reciting a spell, and Park Deok-Gu was using his large shield to push away the monsters that were charging towards us.

My legs were shaking, probably because of the fear that I felt earlier, but of course, I couldn’t just sit on the ground.

‘I’ll die.’

I knew if I stopped, I would die.

When I slightly glanced over at Jung Ha-Yan, I saw her following us while mumbling something to herself.

'Idiot… '

She was somehow lucky enough to catch Lee Ki-Young's attention and to be able to join this hunt. I was sure that no other woman was as lucky as her.

As someone that made a big mistake, even if I returned alive, I was certain that I was going to get kicked out of this group. When I thought that I ended up becoming Jung Ha-Yan's training aid, I felt a bitter taste in my mouth.

How…

Was she able to maintain her composure like this?

Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung, Lee Ki-Young, and Park Deok-Gu were amazing since they were able to calmly fight the monsters with their sword and spear, but for me, I couldn't overcome that sensation in my hands, and the fear that I could die anytime. It was to the point that I started criticizing myself for thinking that this would be easy.

However, Jung Ha-Yan was a bit different. Just like me, this was her first time coming out here and I was certain this was her first time encountering a monster. However, when she looked at me with those eyes, I didn't see an ounce of fear in them.

When I saw her consistently mumbling to herself, I thought that she had gone crazy, but I couldn't see any signs of agitation from her.

'I can't go down like this.'

In this reality called the tutorial, I needed to grow my power in order to survive and since I knew that it was impossible for me to do it alone, I had to use Lee Ki-Young and Kim Hyun-Sung.

If they determined that I was no longer capable of going out with them, then not only would I fail to obtain the same power as them, but they would most definitely set me aside. There was one way left for me.

'I need to stay with them somehow.'

If I managed to return alive, I must use whatever method possible to make a connection with Lee Ki-Young and stay by his side.

Of course, I was bothered by the fact that Jung Ha-Yan was next to him, but once enough time passed by, I was sure that she would realize her worth on her own. No matter how you looked at it, I was better than that dumb woman.

As I continued running while biting my lips, I saw Park Deok-Gu and Lee Ki-Young turning left, but then I suddenly discovered that I couldn't see them anymore.

'Huh?'

I felt as if I was being possessed by a ghost. I couldn't understand what was going on.

'Since when?'

I was sure that I was running while watching their backs, but the situation that I was in felt like I had suddenly plunged into the twilight zone.

I tried recalling where and since when I couldn't see them anymore, but I couldn't remember. Jung Ha-Yan was also quietly staring at the blocked wall.

"Do you know where Mr. Ki-Young and Mr. Deok-Gu went?" I asked.

I carefully spoke up, but she remained silent. Asking her was a mistake.

'She's such a dimwit… '

If even someone like me had lost them in an instant, there was no way that this dumb girl would know where they went. I was certain that this girl was just following me.

"Gahhhhh."

When I heard the monster's screech from far away, my body couldn't help but start trembling. I thought that I should start moving, but my feet didn't move. This was partly because I didn't know which way to go.

I was sure by now that Mr. Ki-Young must have realized that we were missing. If we endured it a bit longer, I was sure they would come and find us.

Even in this situation, I saw Jung Ha-Yan mumbling to herself. She sounded so absurd that I was close to laughing out loud.

“strength, to protect, against enemies, trying to take, from me,” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

She sounded like she was praying to someone, but I couldn’t really understand what she was doing. Watching Lee Ki-Young take care of this kind of woman made me think that maybe he wasn’t in his right mind.

“Wind Blade,” she said.

Swish-

I heard the sound of wind ripping through the air.

“Shut up, you idiot. Don’t you hear the monsters?” I asked.

Just as I was about to move a bit…

‘Huh?’

I started to lose my balance and regardless of my will, my body keeled over to the floor. At the same time, I felt extreme pain in my left leg. Crimson red blood started dripping out from my body and when I heard a splashing sound, I saw my left leg flying across the room.

‘What’s… going on… ’

Before I could determine what was happening, I screamed.

“*Kyahhhhhh!* S-Someone! Someone… h-help me please. H-Help me!” I screamed

“I-I-It’s no use, Miss H-Hye-Young,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“M-My leg… my leg…”

“I-I used my magic to b-block any sounds, so they probably can’t hear you. The m-monsters won’t be coming here too, so there’s no need to worry,” she explained.

“Please h-help, please…” I begged.

“Y-You’re d-dumber than I thought. Y-You… caused trouble for o-oppa and… r-ruined the hunt,” she said.

“Shut up, damn it! It hurts… I’m telling you it hurts! Don’t you see my leg? Hurry up and bring Mr. Ki-Young or…” I shouted.

I grasped my throbbing leg with my hand. Since blood was spilling out from it, I was unable to make any reasonable judgment. I quickly took off my outerwear and tied it around my leg, but I wasn’t even sure if this was the proper treatment for a severed leg or not.

My chin started shaking. My body started trembling.

I couldn’t understand how my leg got cut off in the first place and honestly, I didn’t even want to know. Right now, figuring out whether this was a dream or reality was the most important.

As if my leg was scorched by fire, the pain was still there and the tears that filled my eyes made my vision blurry. When I slightly looked up, I saw Jung Ha-Yan looking down at me with a bright smile.

‘Huh?’

‘Wind Blade.’

Her voice was suddenly stuck in my head. I thought it wasn’t possible, but I definitely saw a green wind swirling about one of her hands.

‘Why? Why? How did that woman?’

Before I could think about that, I instinctively felt fear.

“Oh… Miss H-Ha-Yan…” I called out.

“Yes, Miss Hye-Young,” she answered.

“Why are you doing this all of a sudden?” I asked.

“I-I didn’t want to do this either, but I-I had no choice. It’s because you kept trying to steal m-my oppa from me, so I-I had no choice. I-I didn’t want to do this either,” she answered.

“Wh-What are you talking about?” I asked.

“I don’t like it when people pretend like they don’t know… y-you flirted with my oppa f-first, right? You were trying to s-s-steal him away from me, right? You said you would take him from me, right?” she said.

‘You’re… crazy.’

Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t in her right mind and I was a bit shocked that I didn’t catch on earlier. The woman that was in front of me was definitely crazy. I saw a small smile on her face and that made her seem like she was filled with madness.

“I… I wasn’t actually going to do it,” I told her.

“Lies.”

“It’s true…”

“You’re lying! D-Do you know how much pain I was in? Y-You were talking to oppa, you held hands with o-oppa and when you leaned on o-oppa, I felt like my heart was breaking. Y-You probably can’t even imagine it,” Jung Ha-Yan explained.

“I-I can understand that. Yes… I-I can understand, so please h-help me. I-I won’t appear in front of your oppa ever again,” I said.

“I-I’m sorry, but no matter how much I think about it, I can’t do that. You need to feel pain just like I did. I just can’t forgive you for trying to take oppa away from me and if you’re alive, I-I’ll be very worried…” she said.

“*Kyahhhhhh!*”

The same sound of the wind ripping through the air resounded and one of my arms was instantly severed. What followed afterward was an enormous amount of pain.

I tried to struggle, but it didn’t change anything and the only thing I could think of was escaping from this place. I desperately tried to crawl out, but because of the fear

and pain, I couldn't crawl properly.

"H-Help me. Please… please it's all my fault. Help me. Please… *ahhhh,*" I begged.

"I-I told that I can't do that. If you do that, I-I'll feel bad…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Please, it's all my fault. All my! Fault! *Eup! Eup!*"

"I-I can do this with magic. You're being loud, so I think it'll be best to cover your mouth," she said.

My voice wouldn't come out and it felt like a strange power was choking me. Tears kept flowing out of my eyes and I continued struggling because of the pain throughout my body, but it didn't change anything.

"*Eup… eup! Eup!*"

"S-So, I-I'm sorry," she said.

While I was struggling, I heard a voice.

"Ha-Yan?" Ki-Young called out.

"O-Oppa," she said.

It was Lee Ki-Young, someone who could be considered the culprit behind all of this.

CHAPTER 21
RELIEF

"Ha-Yan?" I called out.

"O-Oppa," she said.

'I knew it… '

What I saw was worse than I imagined. Jung Ha-Yan was smiling quietly while Park Hye-Young was rolling on the ground with her arm and leg cut off. I almost retched after seeing her struggling, but I forcefully suppressed it because I saw Jung Ha-Yan's eyes waver.

There was a strange feeling of anxiety when I saw the wall made out of magic, but it was worse than I imagined.

'What… should I do?'

I wasn't really sure how I should deal with this. I tried to quickly find Jung Ha-Yan because I thought finding her before something untoward happened to her was the best solution, but it was no use.

'If only Park Deok-Gu was here.'

He couldn't feel magic. Coming here alone after telling him to watch the left road was a big mistake.

"Eup… Eup!" Park Hye-Young was struggling.

During this time, strange and unknown magic was covering her mouth. I didn't know what to say when I saw the pleading look in her eyes.

I had no idea what kind of reaction Jung Ha-Yan was going to have, so when I slightly looked at her, she looked as if her soul had left her body.

I guess she stopped thinking because all this happened so suddenly.

Honestly, I was in the same situation as her because I was currently contemplating between two options.

'Is running away the right choice?'

Or…

'Is pretending not to know the right choice?'

It was a problem that I had to think about at least once.

When my body felt the threat, it kept yelling at me to turn back, but my brain didn't agree.

I started thinking about the pros and cons. Jung Ha-Yan definitely liked me, and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that her feelings for me had long surpassed infatuation. There was a good chance that I was the reason why she wanted to kill Park Hye-Young, no, I was sure that I was the reason.

It was possible to think that she had malice towards Park Hye-Young before this, but based on the reactions she showed so far, there was only one answer.

If I evaded Jung Ha-Yan here, she may start attacking me. I didn't want to start fighting with a crazy woman that could use spells that I was unfamiliar with but letting time pass by like this was suspicious.

In the end, I had no choice but to speak carefully.

"What happened… to Miss H-Hye-young?"

"Excuse me?" she asked.

I was really hoping that she wouldn't betray the opportunity that I was giving her and would simply tell me the truth. There was nothing more I could do to help her.

"What happened to her… arm and leg?" I asked.

I didn't forget to cover my mouth with my hand and reacted as if I couldn't believe

what I was seeing.

That was when Jung Ha-Yan's expression brightened up a bit. I guess my reaction was different from what she expected and that made her think that she avoided the worst possible situation. I was sure that she was thinking that I still had no idea that she was the one behind this.

The things that she could say were very simple and if it was her, I was sure that she knew the answer.

"I'm not sure either. Oppa… s-suddenly…" she started.

Her hands, legs, lips, and voice were all shaking, but it wasn't because she was scared. She just didn't want me to know this was her doing.

It was also possible that she reacted this way because she wasn't used to lying, but despite that, Jung Ha-Yan continued talking. "When I opened my eyes, I was separated from everyone, so I-I don't really know what happened. When I arrived here, Miss Hye-Young… s-she was already like this."

'Not bad.'

It wasn't a bad excuse. Using my trembling hand, I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand and pulled her into my arms.

"Did you get hurt anywhere?" I asked.

"O-Oppa."

I wasn't worried that she got hurt somewhere.

My heart was pounding like crazy.

Not only did I keep checking to see if she was currently chanting a spell, but I tightened my grip around my spear.

During that time, Park Hye-Young looked at Jung Ha-Yan with fear in her eyes.

"Eup! Eup! Eup! Euup! Eup!"

I had an idea about what Park Hye-Young was trying to say.

'Run away.'

Or…

'Save me.'

There was a good chance that it was the latter, but unfortunately, there wasn't anything I could do. If I became hostile towards Jung Ha-Yan or neglected her right now, it was the same as committing suicide.

Her mind must have been more exhausted and damaged than I thought.

I knew she liked me, but her obsession led to her turning hostile towards others and murdering them, so I wasn't sure what kind of reaction she was going to have if I rejected her, but I was certain that she would release that anger on me.

Jung Ha-Yan was a bomb that was difficult to deal with but between a talented person that I could use and a piece of trash that barely had the potential to grow, who was I supposed to choose?

The answer was simple. No matter how you looked at it, picking Jung Ha-Yan was the reasonable answer, but that wasn't the only problem.

'I can't save her.'

I didn't have the power to save the dying Park Hye-Young. Even if she really was a useful card, I had no choice but to abandon her right now. I understood what she was feeling, but I was desperate too.

"Eup! Eup! Euup! Euuup! Eup!"

Park Hye-Young looked at me desperately, asking me to help her, to not abandon her and it was difficult to avoid her gaze. I quickly approached her and started tying around her wounds using my clothes. I saw Jung Ha-Yan's surprised expression, but I'm sure she knew.

'Park Hye-Young is going to die. She'll die soon.'

She had lost too much blood, which caused her to slowly lose her mind. Even now, her eyes had started to become out of focus.

"I think that the traps in this dungeon have been activated, but I'm sure that you haven't noticed it just yet since you are in a wall made out of magic," I told her.

Jung Ha-Yan was the one that created the wall.

"…"

"Considering how I felt magic at the entrance that led underground, there could be similar trap-like devices around here, but I didn't take that into account," I explained.

I was sure that there wasn't a device like that on the first floor of this dungeon.

"There's a good chance that the trap activated while I was reciting my spell, so it's most likely that the spell that's covering her mouth is from a trap that we are unaware of… thankfully, I don't feel any other magic around us…" I said.

Jung Ha-Yan was the one that activated the spell.

"Yes… yes…" was all she said.

"Eup! Eup!"

A suitable scenario was already created for Jung Ha-Yan, but the problem was whether Kim Hyun-Sung was going to buy this bullshit.

He had already come here once, so I was sure that he was aware of the fact that there weren't any traps on the first floor of this dungeon.

If I talked bullshit to him, he would surely be suspicious of me.

I had no idea how I should deal with Park Hye-Young, who was currently on the ground because I wasn't sure how Kim Hyun-Sung was going to react once he saw her.

Falling for a trap? He knew there weren't any traps here.

The monsters attacked? The cuts were too clean. No matter how you looked at it, the

monsters didn't attack Park Hye-Young. The faint traces of magic around her body and the unknown magic covering her mouth were proof that Park Hye-Young was killed by a different power and not by a monster. I was certain that Kim Hyun-Sung would notice these.

I continued tying my clothes around her wound, but this wouldn't be enough to treat her. I had never learned basic hemostasis or first aid, but pretending like I was doing something was my limit.

'Damn it.'

In the end, I noticed that Park Hye-Young's struggle and squirming were slowly weakening.

'He can't find out.'

I couldn't let Kim Hyun-Sung find her, so the best method would be to let the monsters find her before the former could, but I had too many things to think about.

Most of all…

'I don't want to do it.'

But I thought it was the least I could do.

I saw Park Hye-Young panting, and I realized that she was losing her breath, so I quietly recited a spell.

"Lord. Hot flame, the power to stop," I said.

Jung Ha-Yan looked at me with a puzzled look as I started reciting.

"Fire Wall."

I used this spell by scraping whatever remaining mana I had. I instantly felt dizzy, but I bit my lips and focused my mana on maintaining the spell.

"O-Oppa," Jung Ha-Yan called out.

"It'll be difficult for us to take her back since she already lost a lot of blood and even

if we took her with us, we might die with her too. She's already gone, and I can't lose you too… so let's get out of here as soon as possible. Since we can't recover her body, this is the least we can do. Yeah, this is the least we can do for her," I said.

The fire enveloped Park Hye-Young, who had finally stopped breathing. The flames consumed her body. The fire flickered, making it look as if we were having a party.

I stared absent-mindedly at the fire.

'This was the best decision.'

When I slightly looked over at Jung Ha-Yan, she looked as if she had a hard time holding back her laughter. Even though I was feeling nauseous, she wasn't the only one that had turned into a monster. We were in the same boat.

I couldn't help but feel ashamed.

I wanted to watch the fire a bit longer, but staying here was an act of suicide.

Maybe it was because of the fire that I created, but the magic wall that Jung Ha-Yan created had started to break down.

When I immediately started moving, I saw Park Deok-Gu waiting for me.

"Where's Miss Hye-Young? Is noonim safe…" he asked.

When I shook my head instead of answering, I saw him nodding as if he understood the situation. He displayed a small smile when she saw Jung Ha-Yan, but once he got the hint that Park Hye-Young died, his expression turned slightly serious.

"And the other monsters that were nearby?" I asked.

"Seeing as how there weren't that many, I think Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung led them towards the other side… he's a fast dude, so I'm sure he'll survive somehow," Park Deok-Gu answered.

"That's a relief," I commented.

I was really relieved. The fact that he was far away from this place was a relief.

“Anyways, w-what happened?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s a long story, so I’ll explain later. There are also things that are hard for me to say…” I answered.

“I-I understand hyung-nim,” he said.

It wouldn’t matter even if I gave him a vague explanation.

When I started running while thinking that it would be best if I didn’t tell anyone about Jung Ha-Yan’s story, I saw a few monsters charging towards us.

“Hyung-nim, are you okay?” Park Deok-Gu asked worriedly.

“I’m out of mana,” I answered.

“Don’t push yourself,” he said.

As Park Deok-Gu ran while pushing away the monsters, we were able to get farther away from that place. I felt like my lungs were going to burst, and it was the same for Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan. Everyone looked exhausted.

Honestly, I felt like I was going to pass out, but I knew that I must not lose consciousness. I had to finish this.

When I looked back with a slightly dark expression, Jung Ha-Yan softly opened her mouth.

“A-Are you… s-sad?”

She looked like she was feeling anxious, and I knew very well the answer that she wanted to hear from me.

“I’m just glad that you’re not hurt.”

The corner of Jung Ha-Yan’s lips went up when she heard my answer, and I saw a bright smile on her face.

“O-O-Oppa,” she said.

“I’m really glad that you’re safe,” I told her.

Only half of that was the truth.

CHAPTER 22
DESIGN

“I’m not sure if Kim Hyun-Sung is alive,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I’m sure he is,” I answered.

Park Deok-Gu started talking once he broke through some of the monsters that were around us.

He seemed a bit worried. After I told him that Park Hye-Young wasn’t coming back, I guess he started feeling restless because Kim Hyun-Sung basically took all the monsters with him, so Park Deok-Gu was worried that he might not come back, just like Park Hye-Young.

But even if Kim Hyun-Sung was on the defensive side, it was difficult to imagine him getting ripped to shreds by the monsters and once he actually started moving fast, it was difficult to follow him with the naked eye, so I was sure that he wouldn’t have any trouble losing a group of monsters. I was certain that he had escaped from that area by now and there was a good chance that he was worrying about the same thing as me.

We put in a lot of effort for this hunt, so if we returned to the shelter with one of us dead, it would surely dampen the morale of the others back there.

This expedition had to be successful no matter what. Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung was still unaware of the fact that Park Hye-Young died, but I was certain that this incident alone would give him a headache.

“It’s unfortunate. I wasn’t exactly close to Park Hye-Young, but she seemed like she was always trying her best…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“We could have all died because of her, so we got off pretty easy,” I commented.

“T-That’s true, but.”

“Right now, we need to be thankful for the fact that we are still alive. There isn’t much that we could do since she didn’t listen to us, it was her fault for getting aggroed after acting wildly and she was the one that kept on screaming as if she wanted all the monsters to hear her. To be frank, if you or Ha-Yan died instead of that woman, I wouldn’t have been able to forgive her,” I explained.

It wasn’t as simple as *‘not being able to forgive her.’*

I might even want to kill her myself since Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan were precious cards to me.

When I slightly glanced over, both Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu looked at me with strange expressions. Jung Ha-Yan looked as if she was touched and Park Deok-Gu looked as if he was slightly embarrassed.

“Oh…”

“Well, I-I probably would have done the same thing,” Park Deok-Gu said.

Even though Jung Ha-Yan was the one that killed Park Hye-Young, I didn’t want to think about that.

Excluding Kim Hyun-Sung, these two people were the only ones that I could really rely on. Park Deok-Gu was a meatshield whose endurance and stamina stats were high, while Jung Ha-Yan had potential that was difficult to measure as a mage. The fact that these two were relying on me was a disadvantage, but in some ways, it was an advantage. The problem was that one of them was like a bomb that I couldn’t control, but based on her nature, there was a good chance that she could be of use to me.

“So how are you going to explain this to the people back at the shelter?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“There’s nothing to explain. There was a mistake, a person died and that’s it. If they get scared because of this…”

“If they do get scared?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“No matter how much help we provide them with, they’ll eventually die. You have to keep in mind the fact that we’re in a tutorial. We should assume that things will

become even more dangerous once we enter the actual game," I explained.

There were times when we forgot that we were in a tutorial because we were nervous at the possibility that we could die if we made a single mistake.

But everything had only just started.

Once we enter the actual game, it could be filled with people that Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't be able to control and there may be a lot of monsters that were even more powerful than the monsters we were fighting right now.

'We can't be satisfied with this.'

If we become satisfied and complacent like the people back at the shelter, we would all die. Excluding Lee Ji-Hye, who seemed to be the only one with a brain, everyone else were idiots. I was surprised by the fact that none of them were useful and it was to the point that I couldn't understand why Kim Hyun-Sung was so obsessed with them. I thought that maybe he had some kind of connection to these people in his past life, but I didn't have the luxury to dig into this past.

"We'll sleep over here tonight," I said.

"We're not going back to the shelter?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"It's too far," I answered.

"I thought we were close… ugh. I don't know how you're able to memorize the paths so well, hyung-nim," he said, complimenting me.

"This is nothing. I left recognizable marks from the beginning," I told him.

"You even left marks?"

'This guy… '

I never expected Park Deok-Gu to use his head, but seeing his reaction, I was certain that even his brain was filled with muscles.

Park Deok-Gu must have seen how speechless I was because he flinched and Jung Ha-Yan quickly continued the conversation.

“Ex-Excuse me.”

There was a noticeable small mark on the wall that was made by scraping the wall with a spear.

“You knew about it too, noonim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“It’s good to keep an eye out on your surroundings. What will happen if we get into the same situation earlier and we got separated…”

“Ahem, I don’t think that’ll happen again…” Park Deok-Gu commented.

Seeing how he didn’t finish his sentence, I guess he was feeling a bit flustered. The way he looked around with that embarrassed look before sitting down was a sight to see.

I wasn’t thinking about nagging him at a place like this, so I sat down with this tired body of mine. Jung Ha-Yan sat right next to me as if she became a cicada on an oak tree and when Park Deok-Gu saw her, he had a cunning look on his face.

“Ahem… hyung-nim, I’m going to go look around the area real quick,” he said.

“Is that necessary?” I asked.

If possible, I wanted him to stay here.

“There might be monsters nearby that we haven’t noticed yet,” he said.

He wasn’t wrong.

“Hyung-nim, you’ve used a lot of that magic or whatever it was… so I think it’ll be best if noonim looks after you…” he suggested.

“Oh! P-Please leave it to me, Mr. Deok-Gu,” Jung Ha-Yan said excitedly.

“Just don’t get lost,” I told him.

“I’ll just look around the area for a bit,” he said.

I nodded, but when I saw him leaving the area, I was worried about the fact that I

would be left alone with Jung Ha-Yan. I knew that she wasn't crazy enough to suddenly use magic on me, but the scene I saw earlier kept replaying in my head. Jung Ha-Yan was giggling while Park Hye-Young was wriggling with her arm and leg severed. I couldn't help but be scared of Jung Ha-Yan.

"Status window."

When I called for the status window, my information was naturally reflected in my eyes.

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's Status Window and Stats.]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious Strategist]

[Job - Mage]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 10/Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 14/Below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 25/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 12/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 05/Below average growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Attribute - Mind's Eye]

[Overall Review - You've grown a tiny bit. I've confirmed that your stamina, magic and intelligence has grown a lot. I guess you had to use your brain a lot. I can see that your intelligence stat has grown and reached a record high, but don't become too arrogant. Your stats are worse than the monsters' secretions.]

I didn't know whose opinion this overall review was based on, but I didn't like it. Although I wouldn't be able to come this far without this, I still wanted to do something about this overall review.

However, I couldn't help but feel a bit happy about how much my stats had grown.

I noticed that my magic stat had increased by two points and I guess I really did use my head a lot because compared to the other stats, my intelligence stat was the highest. I still had no idea about the exact reason as to why the intelligence stat existed in the first place, and just what exactly it improved, but I was certain that my basic thinking skills had improved compared to before.

'Luck.'

I still had no idea how the luck stat worked, but it increased by two points as well.

I was happy because it seemed it was telling me that Jung Ha-Yan's condition didn't affect me in a negative way.

'Not bad.'

Considering how my trash stats had been at the lowest at the start, yet now, when compared to other people's stats, my stats weren't all that bad anymore.

"Did your… stats go up?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Yeah, did anything change for you?” I asked.

“N-No. Nothing yet… still, my magic stat increased a bit. Also, my stamina and strength…”

“That’s a relief,” I said.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Innocent Supporter]

[Job - Mage - Average Rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 15/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 18/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Attribute - How to become a mage - Epic Rank]

[Overall Review - Be careful. Nice boat.][1]

I opened Jung Ha-Yan's status window out of curiosity and didn't see any big differences compared to before. The only thing that caught my eyes was her magic stat, which increased by three points. Her nature was still innocent supporter; if she could still be considered as being innocent despite her current condition, then I guess she was. I had no complaints there, but I wish it made it easier for me to understand.

'What's with the overall review?'

For some reason, it gave off an ominous vibe.

"I-It's all thanks to you o-o-oppa," she said.

"No, I didn't do anything," I told her.

It was true. I truly hadn't contributed much in helping her grow her stats.

When I quietly smiled, Jung Ha-Yan started smiling brightly. Her smile did look a bit scary, but I couldn't make it look obvious that I was startled, so I lightly patted her head and then I saw her lowering her head. She was no longer the crazy woman that smiled after having severed Park Hye-Young's arm and leg. In this situation, I couldn't help but realize once again that she truly had feelings for me. Right now, Jung Ha-Yan was the person that I was most worried about because I had to find a way to control this uncontrollable bomb.

'I have two choices.'

First, push her away very slowly. I am not saying to push her physically away from my arms. She liked me more than a lover and I would push her from that to a brother and sister type of relationship. It wouldn't be an affection between a man and woman anymore, but between siblings.

Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't use her magic to cut off my limbs just because she was jealous; and honestly, it was the safest and most rational method.

Second, quickly make her mine. The second choice was for us to truly have an intimate relationship.

I would have to develop a relationship where not only would she trust and follow me, but she would do anything I ask of her, no questions asked.

Honestly, I wanted to go with the first choice and even though I knew it wasn't going to be easy. There was still room to direct our relationship in that way.

When I patted her head again while thinking about different things, she grabbed my hand that was on her head. Honestly, I was a bit surprised by what she did.

"Ahem… ahem…"

Park Deok-Gu returned from his patrol.

"Hey, you two look good," he commented.

"Sorry? Oh… no. It's not like that…"

Jung Ha-Yan appeared very flustered.

Park Deok-Gu displayed the same cunning smile as before and spoke towards Jung Ha-Yan.

"I asked you to look after hyung-nim, but it seems like you have a bit of a sly side, noonim."

"I-It's nothing like that," she said.

She must have felt pressured by Park Deok-Gu's snicker because she stood up from her seat and quietly started heading to a corner. After seeing that, he snickered again and sat next to me.

"Hey, did I come back too early?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Weren't you having a good time with noonim?"

I had no idea what this guy was talking about. No, thinking about it now, he was 23 years old and Jung Ha-Yan was 21 years old, so I wasn't sure why he was calling her noonim. No matter how you looked at it, Jung Ha-Yan looked younger than Park Deok-Gu.

"You do know that Jung Ha-Yan is younger than you, right?" I asked.

"Of course, but she's going to be yours sooner or later, so as your brother, I shouldn't treat her like a younger sister," he answered.

"Bull…"

'Shit' was what I was going to say and now that I think about it, there was something strange.

What I wanted from Jung Ha-Yan from the start was a familial bond and not a romantic relationship. It was probably true that the environment she was in led her in the wrong direction, but despite that, there was a piece of the puzzle that didn't quite fit.

But it felt like that last piece finally fit. So, it was all because of…

'Damn it… '

The wingman.

"Don't forget about me if things end up working out. Honestly, I didn't say it, but after you asked me to look after her, I was secretly helping her," he told me.

"What… how…"

"Ahem… I said things like you two looked good together and hinted that you may have feelings for her… I discreetly asked her about it, but there were too many moments that I can't really remember… hehe… you don't have to thank me…"

"…"

"I thought you had an interesting taste… ahem! As your younger brother, it's only right for me to help! In my opinion, I think you're almost there. You know, despite looking like this, I was known as Park Deok-Gu, the love doctor in Gangwon-do," he

explained.

He probably didn’t know how I felt because he continued talking about himself with a smile.

I was speechless.

I couldn’t help but realize that choosing between the two choices was meaningless.

‘Park Deok-Gu, you pig… ’

The checkmate move was almost perfect. I couldn't think of a move to stop the designs of this pig with brains for muscles.

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1. Nice boat is usually used in response to witnessing something exceptionally violent or gruesome. It was a meme born from 4chan from the cancellation of the anime "School Days" in Japan. Instead of the regular episode airing, boats were shown instead. Finally, someone commented "Nice boat." which ended up becoming a meme. For more details:
https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Nice%20boat ☜

CHAPTER 23
CALCULATIVE KILLER (1)

I didn't have a choice to begin with since according to Park Deok-Gu's design, it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan disliked the first choice. No, there was a good chance that she was heading towards the second choice despite my thoughts.

"*Snore*…"

When I looked at Park Deok-Gu, who was snoring beside me, my feelings became complicated. I didn't even think about having a romantic relationship in this kind of place where we had no idea when we were going to die, so having that kind of feeling wasn't rational.

It was completely different from being in a relationship. I didn't like the idea of becoming closer to a woman that may cut off my limbs someday, but…

'I have to do it.'

Ironically, becoming closer to her was the only way to avoid the *severed limbs* ending. She was the most dangerous person, but at the same time, the most trustworthy person for me.

I didn't like to gamble, but if needed, I was prepared to throw the dice.

I lightly nodded at the reality I didn't want to acknowledge and talked to Park Deok-Gu, who was still snoring.

"Wake up."

"Ughhh…"

"Wake up, Deok-Gu," I said.

"Ugh… what? Is it morning already?" he asked.

“We’re going to leave a little early,” I answered.

“Hey, noonim. Wake up,” he said.

“…”

“I guess she’s a heavy sleeper… noonim, it’s time to wake up,” he said again.

“…”

“Ugh… it seems like noonim has turned into sleeping beauty… don’t you think she needs a kiss from her prince?” he asked.

‘Bastard.’

He was teasing me without realizing how I was feeling.

My mana had been restored, so I wanted to put a fireball into his mouth.

His comment wasn’t even that bad, but it felt like I was being cornered. Still, Jung Ha-Yan had to wake up, so I had no choice but to lightly walk over.

“Ha-Yan,” I called out.

“…”

“Ha-Yan, it’s time to wake up.”

“Ugh…”

When I lightly patted her head, I saw her getting up while rubbing her eyes. I guess she wasn’t fully awake yet.

She was surprised when she saw me and I saw her getting flustered, but even that side of her made me feel a bit scared.

“Oh… oh. Okay, oppa,” she said.

“We’ll be heading to the shelter soon,” I said.

“Got it,” Park Deok-Gu answered.

“We’ll eat light and then head out.”

“Ahem, leave it to me,” he responded.

After eating a really light meal, it only took us a moment to prepare.

Someone once said that humans were animals that could adapt. Seeing as how everyone had their own way of preparing themselves in the morning, I realized that it was true.

“I know Kim Hyun-Sung is capable, but I’m not so sure if the shelter is doing okay since we’ve been away for a long time,” Park Deok-Gu.

“I’m sure it’s fine. As long as those guys don’t do anything unnecessary, like going out to hunt on their own…” I said.

“If they’re able to properly hunt, wouldn’t that be better? We need to increase the number of people that can fight anyways…” he said.

Of course, if they were able to properly hunt, then there was no reason for me to stop them.

“Those guys have been hiding in fear all this time and just because they have had a change of heart, do you think they’ll suddenly change? Not only are the chances that they’ll group up and go out to hunt slim, but even if they do go, they’ll all die if they don’t do it properly. Although, that’s probably for the better,” I explained.

“What do you mean?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I’m saying that what happened to Park Hye-Young shouldn’t happen again,” I answered.

There was a small chance that the people back at the shelter were going to hunt on their own, but if they created their own party and went out to go find monsters, I could only think of the worst-case scenario.

Of course, I couldn’t say that all my assumptions were correct…

“The worst-case scenario would be us returning to the shelter while they are panicking and screaming which will attract all the monsters nearby,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“I don't think there's anyone who thinks the shelter could be in danger since everyone's busy trying to survive. People that are filled with fear can’t make rational decisions… In the end, they won’t be able to block a large group of monsters that comes charging in and when that happens, that’s the end for the shelter,” I said.

Such an outcome was awful.

“That was probably the reason why Mr. Hyun-Sung instructed us to take the long way back since there could still be monsters following us,” I told him.

“The more I think about it, the smarter I think you are hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu complimented.

I definitely wasn’t smart.

“It’s nothing like that,” I said.

I just knew to think about the worst possible scenario and act around that.

Even while walking, I couldn’t help but feel anxious because I kept thinking about the situation that I told him about earlier. Thinking of the possibility that it could happen made my mouth dry.

Honestly, I didn’t care what happened to those people, but I didn’t want to lose the shelter’s natural and economic resources.

We barely managed to stabilize that place.

We still didn’t have a plan in regards to capturing the dungeon, so the shelter was still a must for us.

As I thought about many things while walking, I noticed a strange silence around us. This kind of silence made me feel a bit uneasy, so after talking to Park Deok-Gu and

Jung Ha-Yan for a bit, we were finally able to see the shelter in the distance.

Unlike before, the entrance was completely sealed off. Lee Ji-Hye must have noticed us because I saw her coming outside after removing the rocks, but they must have sealed it really tight because it took her a while to come out.

She slowly approached us and with the same smile on her face, she spoke. “Ki-Young oppa, Deok-Gu oppa, you guys are back. Where’s Miss Hye-Young and Mr. Hyun-Sung…”

“Park Hye-Young died and Mr. Hyun-Sung will return soon,” I answered her.

“Oh, I see,” she said.

When I spoke a bit calmly, Lee Ji-Hye closed her eyes for a moment, nodded and then continued the conversation.

“How…”

“It’s a long story. More than that, did anything happen at the shelter?” I asked.

“Um… can I tell you in private?” she asked.

I was certain that she wanted to talk with me in a comfortable setting.

I guess something did happen because Lee Ji-Hye didn’t look so good.

How was it that whenever I get a sad premonition, it would never be wrong?

When I slightly looked back at Park Deok-Gu, he nodded as if he was telling me that it didn’t matter to him. It wouldn’t matter since he would want to hear it from me later on, but what I was worried about was Jung Ha-Yan’s reaction.

However, I did need to speak with Lee Ji-Hye, so I had no choice but to talk to her after patting her head a little bit.

“Can you wait for me inside? I’ll be right there.”

“Oh! Okay… okay, oppa,” she answered.

I was worried that she might cut up Lee Ji-Hye and kill her later for this.

While walking towards the shelter, she looked back towards me and for some reason, that look reminded me of Park Hye-Young. When we no longer saw the two, Lee Ji-Hye softly opened her mouth.

“How did Park Hye-Young die?” she asked.

“She deserved to die. She screamed when there were monsters everywhere and that’s the reason why Kim Hyun-Sung isn’t with us right now… do you want the details?” I asked.

“No, I think I have an idea about what happened,” she said.

I saw Lee Ji-Hye looking behind her, and I wasn’t sure if she was looking at the path that Jung Ha-Yan took, but for some reason, I had a feeling that she had caught onto what happened. It may be a simple deduction, but I realized that Lee Ji-Hye had caught onto things faster than I thought.

“I’ll quickly tell you what happened,” she said.

“What happened?” I asked.

“Yoo Seok-Woo and a few people went outside,” she answered.

“When?”

“Yesterday morning.”

“You…”

“Yes, I know that I shouldn’t have just let them go outside,” she said, interrupting me.

“But… why.”

“Right after you and Hyun-Sung oppa went out, they had been consistently telling me that they were going to go out to hunt. I’m not sure if they had a change of heart after seeing your magic or if they were dissatisfied with the situation they were in, but they said they were going to take a few men that wanted to go with them. Idiots… at first, I tried to convince them that it was more reasonable to go out after you guys

came back, but…"

"…"

"I'm a powerless woman," she said.

I had an idea about what happened. Showing my magic to those people had an adverse effect.

The issue between Yoo Seok-Woo and Jung Ha-Yan had put the former at a disadvantage. In addition, since his position had been taken away from him, it wasn't a bad idea for him to think that he needed to do something. Not only did he think about obtaining an unknown power, but I was sure that he secretly thought about wanting to be like us.

Excluding Lee Ji-Hye, who was considered as the manager of this place, me, Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu's power here were absolute.

After releasing a sigh, I continued talking. "Wasn't it your job to stop them?"

"I tried my best to stop them. Since you were coming back late, people started feeling anxious… so how could I reject them when they suggested sending a rescue team?" she asked.

"Rescue team my ass… they didn't even care about us… is that why you blocked the entrance?" I asked.

"Yes, since we can't all die together," she answered.

So that was the reason why they completely blocked the entrance. They prepared it just in case Yoo Seok-Woo and the self-proclaimed rescue team requested help from the shelter while being chased by the monsters. Seeing as how Lee Ji-Hye thought about blocking the entrance and not opening it for them, she was obviously trying to protect the shelter.

"I was hoping that those dumb bastards who only knew how to make trouble would die… but you came back after the wrong person died. Oh my… I'm sure the people will be scared… do you still need people that are able to fight?" she asked.

"The more the merrier," I answered.

Honestly, capturing the dungeon was Kim Hyun-Sung's idea, not mine. He was also the one that believed that we needed more people that could fight. He probably thought that we needed to increase our numbers no matter what before we head down the stairs.

"What about you?" I asked.

Using my Mind's Eye, I was able to confirm that her stats were trash, but she was better than Park Hye-Young. She wouldn't randomly swing her spear and she wouldn't scream in the middle of the fight, so there was a good chance that she may do her part properly while calmly staying behind Park Deok-Gu.

"It's scary and I don't like the idea of dying because I got caught up in something. The power that you showed was definitely interesting… and I am envious, but greed is a shortcut to death," she explained.

"…"

"If a crow tit walks like a stork, it'll break its legs. Crow tits have their own way of living,[1]" she explained.

I probably knew what she was talking about.

For some reason, it felt like it applied to me as well, and that thought left a bad taste in my mouth. But her way of thinking was reasonable.

"Rather than living on a battlefield where you have no idea when you will die… don't you think it's better to meet a capable man and live with a peace of mind?" Lee Ji-Hye asked.

While we continued our conversation, I felt someone's presence. When I naturally turned my head, I saw a few figures walking towards us.

'Yoo Seok-Woo?'

I was certain that the person that was walking in the front was Yoo Seok-Woo, however, the three figures that were behind him were people I had never seen at the shelter.

"It seems like the person that I hoped would die has returned. He even brought

baggage…” she said.

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1. Crow tit refers to someone who's trying hard to fit in by becoming someone they're not ☜

CHAPTER 24
CALCULATIVE KILLER (2)

“How many went out?” I asked.

“Seven,” Lee Ji-Hye answered.

I was sure the person walking in front of the group was Yoo Seok-Woo. They were still far away from the shelter, so I couldn’t see them clearly, but the three people that were walking behind him were people I had never seen at the shelter. Out of the seven people, which included Yoo Seok-Woo, the other six were missing and were instead replaced by three strangers that were heading towards the shelter.

It was only right to assume that something must have happened to Yoo Seok-Woo’s party during the hunt and he received help from these people he was walking with right now.

Thinking of this…

‘Did everyone die except for Yoo Seok-Woo?’

There was a good chance that this was what happened.

Based on the gear that the three survivors were wearing, they weren’t any Tom, Dick, or Harry. One of them was holding a sword and shield, another had a spear and the remaining one had a bow. Based on the atmosphere around them and the bandages that were wrapped around their injuries, I was certain that they had fought against those monsters several times at the least.

‘Mind’s Eye.’

[Checking Player Jung Jin-Ho’s Status Window and Potential.]

[Name - Jung Jin-Ho]

[Age - 29]

[Nature - Calculative Killer]

[Job - Magic Swordsman - Rare Rank]

[Stats]

[Strength - 25/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 23/Above epic growth limit]

[Stamina - 24/Above epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 20/Below rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 23/Below epic growth limit]

[Luck - 15/Below rare growth limit]

[Magic - 08/Above rare growth limit]

[Attribute - None]

[Overall Review - Player Jung Jin-Ho has amazing stats, so I can't say it's all that bad. Not only is his overall balance excellent, but he's very well-rounded. If Jung Jin-Ho focuses on his growth, then I'm sure he'll be able to reach the top. I really like his nature. If possible, I would recommend staying away from him since he could be a very dangerous person to you.]

'Magic Swordsman?'

Just by looking at his stats, I was able to realize that his stats were perfectly balanced and the part that stood out to me the most was his magic stats and job.

'Magic?'

Besides Kim Hyun-Sung, he was the first person I saw that possessed magic stats despite not being a mage.

I couldn't keep my eyes off of his Rare-rank magic swordsman job.

He even had eight magic points, which was higher than mine, and just the fact that he possessed magic was more than enough to label him as a strong player.

However, Jung Jin-Ho's nature was what stood out the most.

Calculative killer.

I had seen a lot of nature so far, but this was my first time seeing this kind of nature.

The other two survivors that were beside him weren't all that different. Even though their stats were slightly below mine and Park Deok-Gu's, their overall stats weren't bad, but their nature wasn't as positive as a kind-hearted mediator or innocent supporter.

"I guess I should get ready to greet the guests again. Just by looking at them, I can tell that they're able to fight… but I'm not sure if that's a good thing," Lee Ji-Hye said.

"Go inside and call for Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan," I ordered her.

"Excuse me?" she asked

"Hurry up."

I didn't answer her question and immediately started reciting a spell with a frown.

Lee Ji-Hye must have thought that something was going to happen, so she started heading towards the shelter with a serious look. I also started moving back a little.

"Lord, I, hope, my voice, answer, burn the enemy, give me, strength," I recited.

They did not seem to be particularly hostile just yet because the way they walked towards the shelter looked leisurely at best.

Jung Ha-Yan's nature was innocent supporter, so there was a possibility that their nature and actual actions may be inconsistent just like hers, but I thought that it

would be best to at least be prepared.

'Damn it.'

I built my magic tower with my mana and even recited the spell. Now, all I had to do was finish the spell. But I suppressed it to prevent the spell from escaping my lips.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Jung Jin-Ho."

It was because they greeted me first. When I saw them take a step forward towards me, I took two steps back.

'Boundary.'

I already knew how fast a person was when their agility point was over 20 and honestly, this distance between us was still dangerous for me.

The two people that were beside Jung Jin-Ho may not have noticed that I was trying my best to suppress my magic, but since Jung Jin-Ho possessed magic stats, I was sure he knew that I was suppressing my magic right now.

When he greeted me, I spoke while maintaining my distance. "Nice to meet you. My name is Lee Ki-Young."

"Oh! I've heard a lot about you from Mr. Seok-Woo," he said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"I heard that you changed your job to a mage recently and that you're able to shoot out fire from your hand… I would like to see it someday," Jung Jin-Ho said.

'Yoo Seok-Woo, you trash. Useless bastard.'

"I see."

"It was really interesting. I already knew that we can obtain new powers in this place, but… it is my first time meeting a mage… oh! You don't have to be so wary of me," he said.

I may die if I made the slightest mistake, so not being wary of him was even more

strange. The sword, shield, and bow that they were holding was making me feel frustrated.

I slightly glanced over at Yoo Seok-Woo and saw a slightly nervous expression on his face. I wasn't sure which part was making him nervous, but I thought that it wasn't a positive signal.

"This place is amazing. I heard that there were a lot of survivors, but I doubted it. After seeing this place, I can understand how over 30 survivors were able to survive together thus far," Jung Jin-Ho said.

"I was surprised as well when I first saw this place and it's all thanks to Mr. Hyun-Sung. More than that, how…" I asked.

"Oh, we discovered Mr. Seok-Woo and his party nearby and saw them getting surrounded by the monsters. Unfortunately, we discovered them too late, so we couldn't save the others, but… we were lucky enough to save Mr. Seok-Woo," he explained.

When I looked at Yoo Seok-Woo again, I saw him nodding.

'Seriously… '

Out of all the people he could have brought, he brought these three. I was shocked by his decision-making.

There was an ominous atmosphere around Jung Jin-Ho and maybe it was the effects of my luck stat, but my senses were yelling at me to not go near him.

"That's a relief. I was actually starting to get worried because I heard that Mr. Seok-Woo went out to hunt, although there's nothing much we can do… about the others…" I said.

"If only we found them sooner, we could have saved all of them… it's really unfortunate," Jung Jin-Ho commented.

When I started nervously rolling my eyes, I sensed Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu coming out.

"What's going on hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We have newcomers,” I answered.

I felt less nervous with them around.

On the outside, Park Deok-Gu definitely looked like a threat because of the way he was holding his shield. Of course, there was no need for me to talk about his stats because I believe not even Jung Jin-Ho would be able to break through him because of his high endurance and stamina stats. Lee Ji-Hye must have said something to him because he was wearing his flimsy leather gear and was standing in front of these three with hostility. Honestly, he looked pretty reliable this way.

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan mumbling something with her head down. I didn’t feel a large amount of magic from her just yet, but I was certain that she was preparing herself in case something untoward happened.

“This was kind of unexpected… I thought we would be welcome,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

It was when he realized that we were being openly wary of him.

“I’m sorry, it’s because of the situation we’re in… I can’t help but be wary of someone that I’ve just met. If I’m being rude…” I said.

“It’s fine, Mr. Ki-Young, we totally understand. We have been attacked by people who tried to take our supplies before,” he answered.

“Oh.”

“I think there’s a group of bad people wandering around nearby. We barely managed to escape, but I think some people did die. We saw a lot of people getting slaughtered on our way here,” Jung Jin-Ho explained.

I wanted to ask whether they were the ones who did the slaughtering since my attribute never lied.

I wasn’t sure whether they went around and killed people or not, but I was certain that Jung Jin-Ho was capable of causing trouble. If an ordinary person’s nature was a calculative killer, then, of course, no one would be able to understand them.

“It was a very horrible sight. The monsters already devoured half of their bodies, so we couldn’t check them properly, but I saw traces on their bodies that were created

by humans, not monsters. I'm certain they were sword marks," he explained.

"Is that so?" I asked.

"Yes. They must've tried to run away because I noticed traces of arrows on their bodies and it seemed like they were trying to resist… I think one of the survivors from the bad group is an archer and since there were stab wounds, it's… probably safe to assume that the group uses swords. Have you seen them?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

I naturally looked over at the man that was quietly holding his bow while standing next to Jung Jin-Ho.

I didn't understand his intention for bringing that up, but one thing I was certain of was that a strange tension has been created between us.

'Is he challenging me?'

I was curious to see if he was really challenging me.

Park Deok-Gu must have seen my expression because he quietly moved forward with his shield up in order to protect me and Jung Ha-Yan from the front.

I wondered if Jung Jin-Ho couldn't see Park Deok-Gu.

This guy is probably…

'Is he confident?'

There was a good chance he was.

Everything was nothing more than my assumption, but he seemed like he was targeting this place.

The fact that Jung Jin-Ho's arm kept reaching for his waist bothered me, and I was sure that it bothered Park Deok-Gu as well.

"It's possible that they're active in an area nearby that your party hasn't reached yet," Jung Jin-Ho said.

“That’s a possibility, but I’ve never heard or seen those people before,” I told him.

It was then that Jung Jin-Ho’s hand was about to grab the handle of his sword, so I immediately executed my spell. No, I almost did, to be exact. If I didn’t hear Kim Hyun-Sung’s voice, I was sure that I would have summoned a fire ball.

“What’s going on?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

The hand that was about to grab his sword slowly went down to his pants. Seeing Jung Jin-Ho wipe his hand on his pants and then extending his hand out towards me for a handshake was a sight to see.

I wasn’t sure if this was his intention from the beginning, but after Kim Hyun-Sung appeared, the atmosphere around him slightly changed.

After canceling the spell that I recited, I grabbed Jung Jin-Ho’s hand.

“Anyways, it’s nice to meet you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“It is nice to meet you as well, Mr. Jin-Ho.”

I slightly turned my head and looked at Kim Hyun-Sung who was approaching this way. I was sure that he had suffered for a few days, but he didn’t look exhausted at all.

Kim Hyun-Sung casually turned his attention towards the people that Yoo Seok-Woo brought.

“I’m glad to see that you’re safe. It’s a bit of a long story, but Mr. Seok-Woo brought these people…”

“It’s nice to meet you, my name is Jung Jin-Ho,” he said, interrupting me.

It was then that I thought that Kim Hyun-Sung’s expression looked strange because when he looked at Jung Jin-Ho, his expression looked slightly stiff.

It felt like deja vu. His expression was different, but it was very similar to the time when he first met Jung Ha-Yan.

‘Does he know?’

Kim Hyun-Sung may know the future Jung Jin-Ho. Of course, nothing was certain, but when I saw the rigid look on his face and the anger in his eyes, I became certain that he knew about something because even my body started to tremble.

'Why is Kim Hyun-Sung… reacting like this?'

He was acting a bit different from the Kim Hyun-Sung that I knew.

CHAPTER 25
CALCULATIVE KILLER (3)

'What's wrong with him?'

He acted a bit different from the Kim Hyun-Sung that I knew because he wasn't really the type of person to show his emotions. The only time I saw him show such a big reaction was when he first discovered Jung Ha-Yan and that only lasted for a moment.

'What the... '

I thought maybe he caught on to what we did to Park Hye-Young, but he wasn't looking at me or Jung Ha-Yan. I was sure that he was looking at Jung Jin-Ho.

This was my first time seeing him like this.

Jung Jin-Ho wasn't using magic or anything, but Kim Hyun-Sung's eyes were definitely filled with hostility. His eyes and expression were on guard, his hands and feet were slightly trembling and most of all, he looked very serious.

'He knows Jung Jin-Ho.'

Of course, there was no way for me to know exactly how he knew Jung Jin-Ho, but if I were to think as simple as possible, there was a good chance that they once had an ill-fated relationship in a future that I wasn't aware of.

Kim Hyun-Sung didn't have the ability to see other people's status window like me, so I was sure he wasn't keeping his guard up because he knew about Jung Jin-Ho's calculative killer nature.

Jung Jin-Ho's presence alone made him feel uncomfortable to the point that he was showing hostility towards him.

Even moments later, Kim Hyun-Sung was looking at Jung Jin-Ho cautiously.

It was probably embarrassing for Jung Jin-Ho to extend his hand out for a handshake, but he looked at Kim Hyun-Sung with a bright smile. If I saw his face without knowing his nature, I would have just thought of him as a good person.

When I saw the stupefied look on Kim Hyun-Sung's face, I spoke as I tapped his arm.

"Mr. Hyun-Sung."

"Oh… I'm sorry. My name is Kim Hyun-Sung," he said.

I saw Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Hyun-Sung lightly touching each other's hands, but for some reason, Hyun-Sung's tightly clenched fist kept standing out.

'Killer... killer... '

Jung Jin-Ho's nature was a calculative killer and we even had a subtle confrontation before Kim Hyun-Sung arrived.

Based on Kim Hyun-Sung's reaction after seeing Jung Jin-Ho, I was able to come up with a few different assumptions.

These were the assumptions I came up with under the condition that Jung Jin-Ho was a psychotic killer. One, he either killed Kim Hyun-Sung or the people around him. Or two, there was a good chance that they never actually met and Kim Hyun-Sung simply heard rumors about him. The first assumption was less likely because despite killing him or his friends, Kim Hyun-Sung was still able to maintain his self-control. If my first assumption was true despite this, then he deserved to be called a saint instead of a pushover.

Based on my standards, Kim Hyun-Sung was close to a saint, but it had nothing to do with the current situation.

There was a good chance that he was being conscious of me, Park Deok-Gu, Jung Ha-Yan, and the people inside the shelter. If that were the case, then he had probably already stabbed Jung Jin-Ho dozens of times in his head because I would have done the same thing.

"I'll introduce myself again. My name is Jung Jin-Ho and I've heard a lot about you from Mr. Seok-Woo. He told me that you are the one managing the shelter…"

“I just happened to find these survivors by chance,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I heard that you have been working hard to rescue people,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“Oh, yes…”

“I think you’re really amazing. Mr. Seok-Woo told me a few times that you were strong, but… really… you’re stronger than I thought. Would it be okay if I asked what your stats are?” Jung Jin-Ho asked.

That useless Yoo Seok-Woo must have told them everything.

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“Oh! If you’re uncomfortable, then you don’t have to tell me. We came from the starting point not too far from here and since we couldn’t find any survivors there, we wandered around and coincidentally found Mr. Seok-Woo,” Jung Jin-Ho explained.

“Is that so?” he asked.

“Yes and I have told Mr. Ki-Young this earlier, but I never imagined that there would be so many survivors here,” he said to Kim Hyun-Sung.

Kim Hyun-Sung’s expression remained the same. It was the usual expression he had when he didn’t have his guard up or wasn’t facing enemies hostile to him. Since he had already been through this once, I knew he was used to hiding his feelings, but Kim Hyun-Sung was calmer than I imagined.

I didn’t know how a pushover like him was able to take care of so many survivors, but I was sure that a past I didn’t know of was holding him back.

I had to reflect on my words when I thought about how the first assumption was less likely to be true.

Kim Hyun-Sung was used to controlling his emotions more than I imagined, but despite that, I wanted to believe that my second assumption had a higher chance of being true than the first one.

‘Rumors or stories about Jung Jin-Ho.’

Jung Jin-Ho's potential was through the roof. If I were to compare him to a game, it was as if the foundation for leveling up was already laid there for him. Considering his nature, there was a good chance that he could become a known killer or criminal in the future. If that happened, then he would surely cause an uproar in the world.

My second assumption was that just like how I felt like Kim Hyun-Sung would have underlings in the future, Jung Jin-Ho may also become a famous criminal in the future and Kim Hyun-Sung had either heard of him or had seen him personally. Of course, there was also the possibility that their roles had switched, but considering their nature, it was unlikely and it was also difficult to imagine a Kim Hyun-Sung who enjoyed killing.

"If it's not too much trouble, will it be okay if we join you here?" Jung Jin-Ho asked.

"…"

"We have supplies on us as well, so I'm sure we can all eat it together for a few days. Of course, if you guys don't like us then…"

I contemplated for a moment, but Kim Hyun-Sung nodded.

"No, we always welcome survivors, so we'll guide you inside," he answered.

"Oh, thank you," Jung Jin-Ho said.

His answer came as a shock to me.

"Deok-Gu, help Miss Ji-Hye with guiding these people…"

"Hyung-nim, will it be okay? Just now, we…"

"It doesn't matter, Deok-Gu. If something happens, call me right away," I said, interrupting him.

"Ugh, if you say so hyung-nim… everyone, follow me. This place isn't that comfortable to live in, but it'll be better than wandering out there," Park Deok-Gu said.

Kim Hyun-Sung's decision was unexpected, but it was a reasonable choice at the same time because I was sure that he was aware of the saying, keep your friends

close and your enemies closer. That was a part that I also agreed with.

If Jung Jin-Ho was simply a crazy psycho, it would be best not to let him in the shelter, but seeing how he back down after Kim Hyun-Sung appeared, it made me think that he was a thinker. Actually, he kind of seemed like a selfish person.

I couldn't feel the ominous and delicate atmosphere I felt before this, so Jung Jin-Ho probably took a step back because he believed that he didn't have a chance when Kim Hyun-Sung appeared. It was possible that he had no intention of attacking me and Park Deok-Gu, but before Kim Hyun-Sung appeared, the nervousness that I felt was real.

'Thanks.'

Despite that, I was really thankful towards Kim Hyun-Sung. I couldn't help but smile as the corner of my lips automatically went up.

If Jung Jin-Ho was calculative, then we can use him in some way.

'We can use him. We can definitely use him in this situation.'

It was a pretty random situation, but it wasn't a bad idea, no, I might just be the luckiest person on earth.

The fact that I almost escalated the situation earlier disappeared from my head.

'Thanks, Jung Jin-Ho, you bastard.'

His appearance here was in a way good for me.

When I slightly turned my head, I saw Kim Hyun-Sung. He looked a little dazed.

"Let's head inside, Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

"You can go ahead, I'm going to stay out here for a little bit," he told me.

He looked like he had a lot on his mind, and it was the same for me. However, I had to continue my conversation with him here because doing that was going to be a lot more effective.

“Do you know him?” I asked.

“Oh.”

“I asked because, for some reason, you seemed like you knew that person,” I explained.

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was contemplating, but he answered after nodding. “I guess… you can say that I know a little bit about him, but he probably doesn’t know about me. We just briefly passed by each other a long time ago…” he said.

“Oh, so that was the kind of connection you guys had,” I commented.

“You can’t really call it a connection because like I said, all we did was just pass by each other. Regarding Mr. Jung Jin-Ho, could you…”

“Of course, I won’t say anything to him,” I said, finishing his sentence.

Keeping a secret was the most important part of counseling.

I continued talking with a calm expression.

At first, it was just a formal story and he must have realized that he was being rude after what I said because he quickly continued talking. Kim Hyun-Sung somewhat came back to his senses.

“I knew you would be safe, but you really returned. As expected, you’re amazing.”

“No, I was just lucky. It was a bit difficult, but… I was able to return by taking a detour that was as far away as possible from the monsters. Now that I think about it, I’m relieved that you’re back here safe. Did you run into any trouble on your way back?”

“Actually, there’s something I need to tell you about,” I said, before giving him the chance to continue.

“Yes?”

“Miss Hye-Young is dead,” I said.

He was going to find out sooner or later anyway.

I felt like my head was going to explode right now because of Jung Jin-Ho, but bringing this up in this situation was reasonable. Kim Hyun-Sung looked slightly shocked and even though he wasn't used to people dying, he slowly nodded.

Thankfully, he didn't seem like he was suspicious of me.

I could tell that this was the case when I asked him earlier whether he ran into any trouble. When I noticed that his expression remained unchanged, it became certain to me that he didn't find Park Hye-Young's corpse or any traces of it.

"I see. How…"

"Magic," I said.

"Excuse me?"

"It was an unknown magic," I said.

"Magic?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm sure of it. I can't say exactly what it was since my level is pretty low, but it was definitely magic. Although, I don't think there's any magic remaining there…" I explained.

"Oh…"

"While running with Deok-Gu, I noticed that Miss Ha-Yan and Miss Hye-Young got separated from us. I was reciting a spell back then, so I didn't really know what was going on around me. I was at my limit during that time because I was trying to maintain the spell I was reciting…" I said.

"I see," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"When I found them later, I saw Miss Hye-Young dying with her limbs severed. I think I felt traces of magic… I did manage to find Ha-Yan somehow since she was nearby… but I don't know exactly what happened," I told him.

"Her limbs were severed?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“Yes, they were. I thought maybe she got caught in a trap that was installed in the dungeon, but…”

There weren’t any traps and despite knowing that, he repeated what I said.

“A trap…”

“Yes, I honestly wanted to bring Miss Hye-Young’s body back, but I had no time to… I thought it would be better to burn her body rather than letting the monsters eat her, so I…” I explained.

I was sure that he knew what I was saying.

I burned Park Hye-Young’s body.

Being as honest as possible was the best since the situation was different from yesterday and compared to the nice, innocent Jung Ha-Yan, a more proper suspect appeared.

I thought to myself again.

‘Thanks, Magic Swordsman Jung Jin-Ho.’

The culprit has been decided.

The psychopath killer, Jung Jin-Ho, that bastard was the culprit!

CHAPTER 26
ITEM (1)

Some time had passed after I confessed about what happened to Park Hye-Young. It was obvious, but I didn't say, *'Jung Jin-Ho is suspicious'* or *'That bastard is the culprit*.' Kim Hyun-Sung was the one that needed to come to the conclusion that *'He's the killer that killed Park Hye-Young.'* There was no need for me to purposely persuade or convince him because simply telling him that it had been because of a trap was more than enough.

'Good.'

Rather than making him suspicious of Jung Ha-Yan or me right now, there was a better candidate we could accuse.

When Kim Hyun-Sung came to a reasonable conclusion, it would help achieve the ill-fated relationship they were supposed to have in the future.

As expected, not long after, Kim Hyun-Sung often spent time by himself as he either kept an eye on Jung Jin-Ho's group or quietly looked at us. I think I knew what he was thinking, but I couldn't do anything but watch him quietly because that would be more helpful.

Sometimes, he would display a really cold expression and I thought maybe Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking about how he should kill Jung Jin-Ho.

'His future enemy, a psychotic killer, and the culprit that killed Park Hye-Young.'

There wasn't a single reason as to why he wouldn't get rid of Jung Jin-Ho. Even if his compassion level was the same as Buddha's, I was sure that he wanted to get rid of anything that could cause him trouble in the future. The problem was how he was going to get rid of Jung Jin-Ho.

From Kim Hyun-Sung's point of view, I was sure that he wanted to get rid of the bastard as soon as possible, but he had no choice but to think into it deeper because it was difficult to find the right opportunity to do such a thing. In addition, there

were a lot of things going on.

For example, the issue about capturing the dungeon.

“How about going down together?” I asked.

“Going down… together?” he asked.

“Yes, Mr. Hyun-Sung. Ha-Yan just happened to have changed her job to a mage… and since Mr. Jin-Ho’s group joined us, we’ll have enough people. I think Mr. Seok-Woo will be getting a job soon too… I would like to take things slow, but since we’re running out of supplies, it’s about time we make a choice. Our original goal is to capture the dungeon anyway, so why not do it as soon as possible?” I explained.

“Hm…”

“We can’t stay here forever and even if you’re feeling nervous, I think we need to at least try,” I told him.

I was sure that he had a slight headache because of my question. He had no choice but to think about capturing the dungeon with the divided parties. All I did was bring up the topic, so it was now up to Kim Hyun-Sung to make the decision. He needed to determine whether he would be able to take responsibility for the things that could happen after we break through the dungeon with the others. If Kim Hyun-Sung believed that he could handle the aftermath, then the situation would turn out beautifully.

‘Dungeon control and the death of the fake killer that killed Park Hye-Young.’

To put it bluntly, we could suck out every little bit of use from the magic swordsman, Jung Jin-Ho. If he was going to die in the end, then it would be best to use him as much as possible.

“Going out to hunt again with the new people is unreasonable since we don’t know if we’ll go through the same thing that Park Hye-Young went through… rather than waiting here like this, I don’t think that it’s such a bad idea to go outside. We’re low on supplies anyway, and if we stay here, we’ll eventually die,” I explained.

“…”

Kim Hyun-Sung was very cautious and seeing that side of him made me think that maybe he determined that it could be a bit dangerous. Perhaps he even thought that it would be impossible to deal with Jung Jin-Ho while moving with us. When I was about to change the topic, Kim Hyun-Sung carefully opened his mouth, “I think it’s a good idea.”

“Sorry?” I asked.

“I think it’s a good idea, so let’s try going underground. We’ll probably have to prepare a few things and since we’ve never worked together with Jung Jin-Ho’s party, it’ll be better for us to go there as two separate parties,” he suggested.

“Yes, I thought of the same thing.”

I didn’t want a killer to watch my back and I was sure it was the same for Kim Hyun-Sung.

“I’ll talk to Mr. Jin-Ho and you can bring it up to Mr. Deok-Gu and Miss Ha-Yan…”

“Okay,” I said in agreement.

“Actually, can you call over Miss Ha-Yan and Mr. Deok-Gu for me?” he requested.

“Okay, I’ll do that.”

He looked like there was something he wanted to say and thinking that it could be really good news, I quietly started walking.

Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan were probably spending time by themselves.

After walking for a little bit, I saw the same environment that I usually saw, but the shelter had turned into a heartwarming place recently. I wasn’t used to seeing it this way.

“Thank you, Mr. Jin-Ho,” one survivor said.

“Thanks, Jin-Ho hyung,” another told him.

“Don’t worry about it. We need to help each other out in order to survive.”

Jung Jun-Ho's group was helping the losers in stacking the bricks, but doing that was pointless at this point. They were probably only doing it in order to relieve the losers' anxiety.

"If you need help with anything, feel free to ask me," Jung Jin-Ho told them.

"This is the least we can do since you will be going out to get supplies for us. I think it'll be better if you take a break, Jin-Ho hyung," one of the survivors suggested.

"I'm fine, I can at least help with this. It's not that difficult, so it would be better if we finish and take a break together," he said.

'Bullshit.'

I was speechless upon seeing Jung Jin-Ho laughing and having a good time with the other survivors.

'Idiots… '

No one showed kindness for no reason, but for Kim Hyun-Sung, he may be helping people because of the self-satisfaction that resulted from sympathy. Although, his situation was a bit better than the others.

In my opinion, I think what Jung Jin-Ho's party wanted was to kill the people he was laughing with right now. Thanks to that, it slightly covered the negative gazes that we were receiving when we expressed that we would be moving independently. They were comparing Jung Jin-Ho's party with ours.

'Why are you guys playing around?'

That was what they were probably thinking because not only did Jung Jin-Ho share his food with them, but he also worked with them. It wasn't unreasonable for them to compare us with Jung Jin-Ho's party since we had always kept our share to ourselves.

It seemed like me, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan's supplies were getting low. Still, even if we had a lot of supplies, I didn't think that there was a need for us to copy Jung Jin-Ho.

Cosplaying as a commoner wouldn't give you the power to move and control people.

What could make those types of people move was *authority* that they could only hope to reach.

'From the start… '

I was sure he knew that what he was doing was pointless and despite knowing that, I didn't understand why he was doing it. Jung Jin-Ho, the psychotic killer, hadn't committed any crimes yet, so I was worried that maybe I was making things worse because he might be trying to live as a good-hearted person by suppressing his nature… but it was too late to turn back now.

"Have this too," Yoo Seok-Woo said.

"Oh! Thank you, Seok-Woo oppa."

Yoo Seok-Woo was hanging out with Jung Jin-Ho's party recently. It was probably for the sake of obtaining a job of his own. When I saw how happy he was with them, I guess he would stick with this group from now on.

He would sometimes display an anxious expression, but in the end, he still got what he wanted.

'A job.'

And a place within this small shelter.

I couldn't help but look away when I saw how the others could feel the true value of their work from afar. It was a heartwarming scene and for some reason, that kind of beautiful scene offended me.

When I walked farther, I saw Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu.

"Ha-Yan," I called out.

"Ah, o-oppa."

When I made my presence known, Jung Ha-Yan, who was testing a simple spell, ran towards me and lightly grabbed onto my sleeve. Park Deok-Gu displayed a satisfied smile when he saw that.

'Damn… '

"You're testing a new spell today?" I asked.

"Huh? Oh yes…" she answered.

"That's amazing," I complimented.

"It's nothing. I-It's all thanks to you, oppa," she said.

We weren't dating and I wasn't showing the physical affection that she wanted but the survivors here seemed to have accepted the relationship between me and Jung Ha-Yan. She must have realized this because recently, she hadn't been trying to discreetly hold my hand or come near me. A few days ago, she acted worse than this after telling me that she thought that she had obtained a job. When I didn't really show any reaction, Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she gained some confidence, but during the time when she believed that everyone was asleep, she showed her usual behavior.

'…'

Every time I woke up, my heart would start pounding. Jung Ha-Yan had been getting more and more daring. No matter what might've happened, we wouldn't have gotten this close if it hadn't been for Park Deok-Gu.

"I thought you were going to meet with that dude, Kim Hyun-Sung? You're here earlier than I thought, did everything… end up working out?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"I just met with him and I think he has something he wants to talk to us about… you have time, right?" I asked.

"All I have is time, hyung-nim," he answered.

"Of course. D-Do you know what it's all about?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"Yeah, I think we're going to head underground soon," I answered.

"We're finally going down there?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"We're still talking about it, but I think we'll be heading down there with Jung Jin-

Ho's party," I explained.

"Hm… I don't have a good feeling about those dudes," Park Deok-Gu commented.

"I feel the same way, but taking control of that place is the most important right now, so Kim Hyun-Sung probably thinks that we have no other choice. I understand how he's feeling, but there's a limit to how much we can handle," I said.

"But is this dungeon created so that we can control it?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Probably," I said.

Kim Hyun-Sung was certain that we would be able to control it.

"I'm sure you know without me saying it, but it'll be best to stay away from Jung Jin-Ho's party. Of course, on the outside…"

"Ahem, don't worry too much," Park Deok-Gu said, interrupting me.

"Same thing for you Ha-Yan," I said.

"Okay, I-I understand. Oppa… I-I won't even talk to them," she said.

I wanted to tell her that it was okay to talk to them.

Park Deok-Gu was a little bit better than Jung Ha-Yan because she was a ticking time bomb that needed constant and careful management as well as mental training. If she started acting the same way she did when she was with Park Hye-Young, I wouldn't be able to cover for her like the last time.

"Don't worry too much about Yoo Seok-Woo," I told Jung Ha-Yan.

"I-I'm not worried," she said.

"That's a relief."

When we started walking with Park Deok-Gu leading the way, people started looking at us. The humans that realized the true value of their work and Jung Jin-Ho were looking at us with strange looks, but I thought that there wasn't a need for us to be burdened by them and it would be best to act like nothing was wrong.

Nothing happened yet and we were on our way to a meeting with Kim Hyun-Sung.

"…"

After easily ignoring their gaze, we started heading towards where Kim Hyun-Sung was, but I noticed Kim Hyun-Sung taking something out from his bag.

'…'

I felt pretty good.

Every time I looked at my status window, the gear section had always worried me. I thought that someday, I would be able to either see or wear items and gears that had stats on them, but that opportunity came quicker than I expected.

Increasing our stats before heading underground was needed, but it was also to relieve Kim Hyun-Sung from his anxiety. I was certain that to Kim Hyun-Sung, winning the fight against Jung Jin-Ho's party was more important than capturing the dungeon because he was trying to help the three of us grow and to also prepare us for any future incidents.

"There's something I want to give you," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Did you hide something delicious, bro? Dude, you have the same expression as my grandma whenever she gives me money," Park Deok-Gu commented.

'This pig… '

I really didn't understand why he had to express himself like that and it must have surprised Kim Hyun-Sung a bit because he answered with a smirk. "It's an item."

A smile appeared on my face because this was the moment that I had been waiting for.

The items that I saw weren't a sword, spear, or shield. The items that he took out from his bag were a bracelet and two rings. Even though they looked crude, I felt a mysterious magic emanating from them.

'Thanks, Hyun-Sung.'

I knew that we would have insurance with us underground, but this was much better than I imagined.

CHAPTER 27
ITEM (2)

“Did you say an item?” I asked.

“Yes, an item,” Kim Hyun-Sung replied.

“Where did you even get this, bro?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“I haven’t told you yet, but after that incident, I coincidentally found a chest,” he answered.

“A chest?”

“I guess it would be appropriate to call it a treasure chest and it looked like one of those wooden boxes that were used a long time ago,” he explained.

“I guess there are all sorts of things here, right, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked me.

I couldn’t find out whether what he said was true, but since it was called a dungeon, I guess there were treasure chests that contained these types of items.

I thought of the possibility that maybe these items actually belonged to Kim Hyun-Sung, but I decided not to bring it up because right now, what was most important was what kind of gift he wanted to give us and which item I was going to receive.

“That’s interesting, but if there are more chests like this nearby, then we could’ve looked for it… it seems like there’s a limited number of chests within the entire dungeon, so it’s possible that the chest that you found is the first and the last one in the dungeon. There could be a similar chest underground…” I explained.

“Yes, I’m sure you’re right, Mr. Ki-Young. I did search around this area, but this was my first time finding a chest. I didn’t go any farther, but… anyways, take a look,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Okay.”

I was going to take a look anyway.

There wasn't a need for me to activate Mind's Eye because the moment I held them in my hand, I immediately saw the relevant information about them. I thought about how it would have been nice if I was the only one that was able to see an item's detailed stats, but that feeling only lasted for a moment.

[Iron Dwarf's Bracelet of Steel - Average Rank]

[It's an ornament created by the now fallen Iron Dwarf race. Unlike its crude appearance, the bracelet was created with fine craftsmanship. It'll increase your stamina, endurance, and strength stats by one point.]

The owner of the bracelet had already been decided and seeing as how Park Deok-Gu seemed a bit interested, I guess it was a good item.

The bracelet increased one's stats by three points and it was the same amount of points increased when one obtained a job.

The rank of this bracelet was average, so I assumed items that were ranked from epic to legendary had stats that I couldn't even imagine.

"Ohh…" Park Deok-Gu said.

He looked as if he got allowance money from his grandmother.

The problem was what happened next…

[Magic Shield Ring - Rare Rank]

[It's unknown where this item was made, but it's a very old item. This item allows you two to create a magic shield twice a day by using the magic that's contained within the ring. The user will have to charge the ring using their own mana. (2/2)]

[Divine Healing - Rare Rank]

[It's unknown where this item was made. The ring contains low-ranked holy magic and healing. It can be used once a day. (1/1)]

The remaining two items were rare-ranked rings and the moment I checked them, my eyes unknowingly widened.

'They're really good.'

I did think that I would be able to obtain something if I followed Kim Hyun-Sung, but I never imagined that I would be able to eat something this delicious so early on.

Most of all, they were rare-ranked rings and their skills were too good to the point that I was surprised. Even though they didn't increase stats like Park Deok-Gu's bracelet, they were more valuable.

The Magic Shield Ring, for example, let us say that about four magic points would be consumed when reciting the magic shield spell. Then, it meant that this shield had about eight stats of efficiency. It couldn't be compared to an average-ranked item whose efficiency was only about three stats.

'Good.'

It was the same for the Divine Healing ring. Seeing as how it had the same rank, this ring probably gave at least six stat efficiency, making this an insurance that could protect your body and tend to your injuries since it could only be used twice a day.

In order to go underground, the item that Kim Hyun-Sung selected for himself was probably the insurance that could prepare him for any accidents that could happen.

'Right, we need to make proper preparations.'

When I lightly nodded, I slowly touched the bracelet.

"It looks valuable… can we really take it?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

“You don’t have to worry,” Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

“Ahem… t-then, it’s only right for me to take the bracelet. Thanks, dude. I feel bad since I haven’t done much…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“It’s fine.”

“I’ll pay you back,” Park Deok-Gu told him.

“It’s the thought that counts,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

The owner of the bracelet had been decided, so the issue was the remaining two rings. Honestly, any of the rings would be fine, but I wanted the Magic Shield Ring more than the other since I could protect myself with it. If Jung Ha-Yan wore the Divine Healing ring, there was a good chance that she would use the holy magic that was contained within the ring on me.

‘I’m sure of it.’

It was a bad thought to have, but I had no choice.

Unlike her who was able to use magic all she wanted, I would be spent after just using two spells.

While I was deep in my thoughts, Jung Ha-Yan spoke up first. “I-I’ll take this one.”

She picked the Divine Healing ring. I wasn’t sure if she noticed my expression, but she was definitely moving in the direction that I wanted her to move in.

“Then, I’ll take the remaining ring,” I said.

The corner of my lips kept going up; it would be strange if I wasn’t happy in this situation.

The insurance that could save my life twice a day just landed in my hands. A rare-ranked item landed in my hand without me having to work hard for it or taking risks to get it.

‘This is it!’

“But, is it really okay for us to take this…” I said.

“It’s fine since I have an item as well… for items that have special abilities, there’s a limit to how many times they can be worn, no, they can be worn, but it seems like there’s some kind of limit,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained. He even provided great information.

“So are you saying that even if we wear two rings, only one ring will activate?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s right,” he replied.

I thought there was a need to take my time in testing it out later.

I thanked Kim Hyun-Sung again while displaying a small smile. “Thank you very much, Mr. Hyun-Sung, and as Deok-Gu mentioned earlier, we haven’t really done much for you…”

“T-Thank you… Mr. Hyun-Sung,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“It’s nothing. Also, Mr. Ki-Young and Miss Ha-Yan, you don’t have to worry about it so much since we’re comrades,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

There was a smile on my face.

Kim Hyun-Sung probably thought that we were indebted to him after he saw how thankful me, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan were. He probably thought that we trusted him completely. After seeing that, I became more certain, and to be exact, I became confident after hearing his last line.

‘He’s thinking about sticking with us.’

Since we were comrades.

Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking about sticking with me, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan. In addition, he had always tried his best to win Jung Ha-Yan over to his side. She was a mage with a fixed future, so he probably thought that it was reasonable to cherish and make a connection with her.

Park Deok-Gu wasn’t that bad either. It may only happen in games, but a reliable tank

was always popular. Compared to Jung Ha-Yan or Jung Jin-Ho, his judgment, stability, and the potential he showed during the hunts so far may not be as good, but the stats that he currently possessed was decent. His growth potential may not be as good as the real monsters like Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Jin-Ho, or Jung Ha-Yan, but I believed that he was good enough to do his part. My future felt a bit iffy though.

By being close to Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan, I was a hyung-nim that he could trust and to Jung Ha-Yan, I was close to her, to the point that our relationship was close to lovers. If Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to take Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan, he would have no choice but to take me in too.

I may get points for not making mistakes during a hunt and for being quick-witted, but people like me were all over the Continent. He may use me as an administrative staff in his kingdom that he was going to grow from now on. Of course, it wouldn't be a bad idea to live like a crow-tit like Lee Ji-Hye, but in order to protect myself better, there was a need for me to work hard sometimes.

'It may be difficult to keep up though.'

I thought it would be best to follow along and take advantage of whatever I could.

I spoke while slightly raising the corner of my lips.

"That's true, we're comrades."

We were comrades that protected and cherished each other. After that statement, it felt as if we have gotten even closer to each other. I couldn't help but feel good about it.

"It has a great ring to it, hyung-nim. Yeah… comrade! Oh, so when are we heading underground?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"We'll probably head there soon. I haven't told Mr. Jin-Ho's party yet, but… I'm sure they're waiting for us to take them out on a hunt," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Hm, they did ask if I wanted to go hunting with them, but I refused because hyung-nim told me not to go out…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"Good job," Kim Hyun-Sung said as he looked at me again.

It was reasonable for him to set boundaries on the new party that had just joined, but I guessed he was thankful for what we did.

“Since it’s just us… I can say that I don’t have a good feeling about the new party,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Bro, seeing as how you’re saying the same thing that hyung-nim said, I guess smart dudes really are different. I actually feel the same way,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Even if we go out to hunt and enter dungeons together, we need to set certain boundaries. Since we don’t know what might happen, it’s only right to be cautious. What happened to Park Hye-Young can happen again, so let’s be more cautious this time,” I explained.

“I-I understand what you’re saying,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

Both Jung Ha-Yan and Kim Hyun-Sung nodded.

“Mr. Ki-Young is right. If I were to exaggerate a bit more…” he started.

“Okay.”

“Please think of it as fighting with the enemy,” he said.

Everyone nodded.

“An enemy?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Yes.”

Kim Hyun-Sung decided to take the stage.

“You don’t have to think so much about it right now, but I think it’s best to be somewhat prepared since we don’t know what will happen once we go underground,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

“It’s best to assume that the difficulty is harder than the first floor,” I commented.

“Yes, you’re right. Rather than standing around here, I’ll go tell Mr. Jin-Ho right now. When we’re available, we’ll leave as soon as possible,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“That fast?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“We can make preparations on our way there.”

“Oh, I see.”

I was sure that Jung Jin-Ho wasn’t going to decline because whether their goal was to survive here or enjoy their hobbies, going outside was advantageous for them.

Jung Jin-Ho was aware that compared to Kim Hyun-Sung, there was a difference in their levels and that was why he withdrew back then.

Variables were the most important thing when it came to fights that were considered disadvantageous. There was a good chance that the dungeon would create the variables that Jung Jin-Ho wanted. If he got rid of Kim Hyun-Sung, then his own world may start to unfold.

If he was really a killer, then to him, the shelter was where he would be the happiest. Thus, there was a good chance that he would gamble.

If I were in Jung Jin-Ho’s place, then I would use any means necessary to kill Kim Hyun-Sung’s party. But of course, this opportunity did not belong solely to him. This was also a good opportunity for Kim Hyun-Sung.

I couldn’t help but smile since Jung Jin-Ho was going to die anyway. Considering that, sucking out every bit of benefits from him was the right choice.

CHAPTER 28
QUEST (1)

“It’ll be tough to endure,” Lee Ji-Hye said.

“Don’t you think this is more than enough?” I asked.

“You should consider the possibility of you guys not coming back,” she said.

“Don’t say things like that because that’s not going to happen,” I told her.

“Of course, I trust Hyun-Sung oppa and you, but… you never know what might happen. Anyways, Miss Ha-Yan keeps looking this way. Are you sure it’s okay?” she asked worriedly.

When I turned around, I saw Jung Ha-Yan with a slightly serious expression. Even though she wasn’t showing the same violent reaction like in the previous Park Hye-Young incident, her expression made me curious as to what she was thinking. I was a bit worried because I thought maybe she was having other thoughts, but I would consider this reaction level as stable.

The situation might be kind of different if we were talking while exchanging physical contact, but since we were talking with some distance between us, anyone could tell that we weren’t that close.

When I quietly handed Lee Ji-Hye a bag, she spoke. “You’ve made quite a big decision.”

“About what?” I asked.

“I thought you were the type that didn’t like gambling,” she said.

“I don’t,” I said.

“Then?”

“I’m not dumb enough to step back from a game that I know I’m going to win,” I told her.

Even after assuming all the variables, our win rate was overwhelmingly high. Considering the information we had on the dungeon, the overall stats of the party, and the existence of a regressor, there was no way we would lose. Of course, there were other things we needed to think about, but as someone that needed to seize every advantageous moment, this kind of opportunity was rare.

The bond of comrades that had overcome a crisis together and…

‘The reward for capturing a dungeon.’

I was sure it existed.

I was certain that the chest that Kim Hyun-Sung said he discovered was that kind of chest.

Lee Ji-Hye remained quiet for a moment after hearing my voice and then continued talking with a small smile. “That’s why I like you.”

“Stop talking nonsense,” I told her.

“Anyways, have a safe trip, Ki-Young oppa,” she said.

“Thanks, noona.”

As expected, her face turned serious. Despite looking young for her age, I had a feeling she was always stressed out when it came to her age. It was probably because she believed that a younger woman had a better chance at surviving in this place.

When I started walking slowly, Jung Ha-Yan ran to my side and quickly grabbed the hem of my sleeve. She didn’t say anything to me, but I guess she felt anxious.

Park Deok-Gu released a hearty laugh while Kim Hyun-Sung nodded.

Jung Jin-Ho and Yoo Seok-Woo were quietly waiting for me.

“Let’s head out,” I said.

“Okay,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

There were a total of eight people and to some people, it could be considered as a lot of people. Our party had four people and Jung Jin-Ho’s party had four people and if Jung Jin-Ho was at the center of their group, then Kim Hyun-Sung was at the center of ours.

We were walking together, but there was a subtle distance and I didn’t hear a lot of talking. The only conversation that we had was between Jung Jin-Ho and me, but other than that, the members would talk amongst themselves or spend their time alone.

“By the way, it seems like you guys have been exploring a lot. We never imagined that there would be a new entrance,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“We found it by chance. I’m sure you heard it at the starting point, but in order to escape from this place, you need to either survive or control. Since we don’t know how long it’ll take, we thought deciding on the former was a stupid thing to do… so we decided to take control as much as possible,” I explained.

“Oh.”

“It’s possible that the period of survival lasts until the person succeeds in taking control of a dungeon,” I said.

“I haven’t thought that far…” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“It’s only an assumption.”

“If that’s the case, then are you saying that the people back at the shelter can escape this place too once we take control of the dungeon?” he asked.

“That’s a possibility. Well, whatever method it may be, it doesn’t change the fact that controlling the dungeon is the most reasonable decision. Anyways, thank you so much for agreeing with our proposal,” I said.

“It’s fine since we would like to escape from this place as well. I actually wanted to thank you for providing us with this opportunity because we were feeling a bit anxious since we didn’t know when this was going to end…” Jung Jin-Ho explained.

Seeing his smile made him look like a really good person. It was a type of smile that could unknowingly put my guard down, but since I knew about his nature, I couldn't put it down.

Actually, we should be the ones helping Jung Jin-Ho's party put their guards down, and talking idly with him helped a lot. While walking, we talked about the things that happened to us back on Earth, about the dungeon, and stories about women that we heard from the starting point, but then a rather disturbing topic was brought up.

"By the way, you and Miss Ha-Yan seemed really close. Are… you two…"

It was a topic that no one asked about until now, so I couldn't help but feel a bit surprised. I quietly looked at the others and saw Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung eavesdropping. Yoo Seok-Woo made it obvious that he was looking towards me because he flirted with Jung Ha-Yan before.

Right now, Jung Ha-Yan was pulling onto my sleeve with her head down and she seemed like she was really interested in my answer.

'Don't do this… '

Notwithstanding the pig whose head was filled with muscle, this psychotic killer was trying to participate in this plan.

'A nice brother and sister relationship?'

That was not the case.

'A developing relationship?'

That wasn't it either.

No matter how much I thought about it, it sounded like an excuse for a celebrity who was involved in a dating rumor. Inevitably, I needed to become closer to Jung Ha-Yan anyways, so after thinking for a bit, it didn't take me long to come up with an answer.

I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand, which was grabbing my sleeve, and spoke. "I can't exactly define our relationship yet, but… your assumption is probably correct."

"Ohh…"

Park Deok-Gu had a huge smile and Kim Hyun-Sung also nodded. He probably thought that my presence helped Jung Ha-Yan.

Jung Ha-Yan's reaction was interesting because even though she was looking down with a red face, she tightened her grip around my hand.

'Damn… it hurts.'

She held onto my hand so hard that my weak endurance found it hard to endure.

I thought about the different choices, but I thought this was the best answer. The reason why I told him that I couldn't really define our relationship was that I haven't told Jung Ha-Yan about my feelings yet. It wouldn't matter if I made it official now, but Jung Ha-Yan and I needed to be connected in a more meaningful way. Rather than doing it because they were pushing me, it would l be more effective if I properly told her my feelings.

When I turned my head again, I saw a bright smile on Jung Ha-Yan's face. I got goosebumps after seeing that, but Yoo Seok-Woo must have felt upset because he had a frown while looking at us.

If I had to choose two people that were the least connected with Jung Ha-Yan, I would exclude Park Deok-Gu and choose that jerk. While I believed Yoo Seok-Woo had malice towards me, it really seemed like he wasn't used to hiding his feelings.

While thinking that he probably had the highest chance of being the trash during this expedition, I patted Jung Ha-Yan's head because Yoo Seok-Woo was looking towards us.

The party continued talking with different conversations.

One of Jung Jin-Ho's party members was an archer and because of the effects of their job, they were skilled in reading the road and discovering a monster's presence, but there wasn't a reason for us to avoid them. Jung Jin-Ho seemed like he was hiding his powers, but he didn't seem like he had trouble dealing with the monsters in the area and it was the same for everyone else since they were used to fighting.

It was a bit surprising how Yoo Seok-Woo adapted so fast. I thought he would act the same way that Park Hye-Young did, but he calmly swung his sword and the others weren't so bad either.

They weren't on the same level as Jung Jin-Ho, but they did their parts, to the point that maybe they were the ideal party.

'They're fast and stable.'

I could say that they were on a different level compared to when me, Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, Jung Ha-Yan, and Park Hye-Young went out for a hunt together.

Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Hyun-Sung were prepared for any unforeseen variables and Park Deok-Gu stood in front of us facing the road. Even though both Jung Ha-Yan and I were providing support from the back, the archer's arrow and Jung Jin-Ho's lackeys were more skilled than us, making me feel a bit disappointed they weren't in my party, especially when it came to Jung Jin-Ho.

Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung who used one sword, he kept his opponent in check by using the small shield that was attached to his left arm. Not only that, but if he could actually use magic, that would make things even more surprising.

I think I knew why he didn't really care about Park Deok-Gu, me, and Jung Ha-Yan.

Jung Jin-Ho was definitely strong and although I didn't have any complaints towards Park Deok-Gu, Kim Hyun-Sung, or Jung Ha-Yan, if we could use the card named Jung Jin-Ho for a long time, I think I would feel really satisfied.

"You're strong," I said.

"It's because everyone helped. Do we have to walk farther?" Jung Jin-Ho asked.

"I think we're almost there," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

When I glanced at Kim Hyun-Sung, I saw him nodding. I felt magic from the stairs and even though I didn't know what it was, we had to go in. Honestly, I wanted to ask Kim Hyun-Sung to provide a more detailed explanation, but I couldn't do that.

'I wonder what's in here… '

I had questions about how Kim Hyun-Sung came to the conclusion that it was impossible to enter this dungeon with our current powers.

Curiosity and anxiety were mixed together, but…

“Well then… let’s head in,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

Giving up was a stupid thing to do.

The path down the stairs was dark. When we went down a slightly long staircase, we saw a large iron gate.

Park Deok-Gu, who was in the front, carefully opened the iron gate and when we walked through it, we immediately heard a familiar voice.

It was the woman’s voice that we heard at the starting point.

[You have reached the underground dungeon. Launching Rare Rank required quest.]

[Rare Rank Quest - Survival (0/1)]

“What’s this?” I asked.

“O-Oppa…” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

“Let’s prepare for battle,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“We’ll prepare for battle,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

Even if Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t say anything, everyone tightened their grip around their weapons.

“Gyahhhhh!”

“Gyahhhhhhhh!”

It was because we heard the sound of monsters screeching from far away.

‘Damn it! Damn it!’

I knew that we would have to take risks to some extent, but the difficulty was a bit

harder than I imagined. Now I understood why Kim Hyun-Sung thought it was best to have a large party.

'Defense.'

The number of voices that we heard was simply too many for one person to handle.

"T-The iron gate is blocked."

I heard someone mumbling.

"I'm confident that we can win this, so we won't run away," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"We can do it."

"Gyahhhh!"

The screeching became louder to the point that we could hear them running towards us. Not only were the screeches disturbing, but the way the ground started shaking had me worried. My anxiety caused me to immediately recite a spell.

I guess Jung Jin-Ho's party didn't expect this as well because they looked stupefied, but they quickly got into formation with Jung Jin-Ho as the main attacker.

'We can stop them.'

I was shocked, but I knew we could stop them because the regressor believed that we could take control of the dungeon with our attempt this time.

"Damn, there's a lot of them," Park Deok-Gu said.

The first time we got surrounded by them was back at the starting point, the second time was when Park Hye-Young acted like an idiot, so this would be our third time.

Of course, we couldn't do anything to prevent this situation…

This time, however, we were not about to run away.

CHAPTER 29
QUEST (2)

I got tired of looking at the monsters that were approaching from all directions. The monsters didn't look strong, but since there were so many of them, I couldn't help but constantly remind myself that we were in a dangerous situation.

I understood why Kim Hyun-Sung felt that we didn't have enough people before coming in here.

No matter how strong Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu were, they wouldn't be able to handle these many monsters by themselves. Jung Jin-Ho's party also looked as if they didn't want to be here. Jung Jin-Ho looked like he was thinking about whether they would be able to get out of here alive, however, he didn't seem like he was panicking.

'We can survive.'

We would definitely survive.

Of course, I was going to save the mana that I was going to use for the spells, and even while constantly reciting the spells, I tightened my grip around my spear.

"Deok-Gu," I called out.

"I know," he said.

Park Deok-Gu, Kim Hyun-Sung, and Jung Jin-Ho moved to the front. Park Deok-Gu properly blocked the center and maintained close formation. The two parties that were thinking about how to survive this started to converge. I was worried about our backs, but these guys weren't dumb enough to stab our back in a situation like this. It was the same for Kim Hyun-Sung.

Getting out of this reality that was about to hit us was a priority, so everyone grabbed their swords and charged into the monsters.

Boom!

“Gyahhhhh!”

“Disgusting bastards!”

Monsters charged at us in groups of twos and threes. Park Deok-Gu was trying his best to block them by crouching down and holding tightly onto his shield. I didn’t have to worry about my spear missing because there were targets everywhere.

I felt my spear piercing into them, but I didn’t have the luxury to notice the odd sensation because I had to repeatedly stab them so that both Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung in front of us wouldn’t be overwhelmed.

“Concentrate as much as you can! As much as you can!” Kim Hyun-Sung shouted.

“Hyung-nim and noonim, stay right behind me! If you fall back, I can’t do anything about it,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“O-Okay,” I answered.

“Gyahhhhhh!”

I guess it was getting difficult for them to continue holding back the monsters because it felt like we were getting pushed back towards the iron gate.

Park Deok-Gu used his large body to swing his shield. He created space for us to move in while Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Jin-Ho either swung their swords or pushed away the monsters that charged towards them.

‘They’re strong.’

These two were definitely strong. Not only was Jung Jin-Ho blocking them using his small shield and then stabbing them, but Kim Hyun-Sung was taking care of me and Jung Ha-Yan while watching Jung Jin-Ho at the same time. He was worried that his party might attack us.

‘You don’t need to worry about them, Hyun-Sung.’

“Ahhhhhh!”

“Ahhh!”

Jung Jin-Ho’s lackeys were in a panic, so of course, they didn’t have the luxury to target us. While biting their lips, they were trying their best to block the monsters that were trying to kill them.

The monsters’ blood kept splattering on my spear and face and when their organs fell on the ground, the ground became slippery. I couldn’t help but frown after smelling the foul odor, but because of the chaotic situation, I barely had time to process it.

“Gyahhhhh!”

In order to overcome the disturbing cries of the monsters and our fears, we all screamed.

“Heup!”

Boom!

Seeing a monster flying off whenever Park Deok-Gu swung his shield was a sight to see.

‘You pig! You’re doing great.’

Even though his potential stats weren't that high, the current Park Deok-Gu was really strong. Park Deok-Gu’s strength was a type of strength that was different from Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Jin-Ho’s. I was speechless when I saw how his endurance points were in the mid to high 30s. He endured any attacks that grazed past him.

‘I underestimated him.’

I judged him based on his stats, so I underestimated him. The Park Deok-Gu that I was seeing right now was more intimidating than both Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Jin-Ho combined. His large frame created an overwhelming presence.

Even though the strength of his stats wasn’t high and his magic was basically nonexistent, the shieldbearer that was standing in place wasn’t a simple meatshield. He knew where to block, as well as how and when to attack. He didn’t seem to be in trouble even while blocking an unknown number of monsters.

'Is this guy even human?'

He was so strong that I couldn't help but think that. Of course, it wasn't that Park Deok-Gu wasn't scared. After all, he was kind-hearted and when we had gone out on our first hunt together, he had been busy running away from the monster. However, despite his predicament back then, he wasn't leaving me on my own. Right now, even though he looked overwhelmed and terrified, he didn't run away like the first time. This was probably because he wasn't worried about the formation collapsing or because he suddenly felt confident. His head, which was filled with muscles, wasn't capable of having those thoughts. It was nothing more than an assumption, but the pig Park Deok-Gu looked like he didn't want me and Jung Ha-Yan to either get hurt or die.

"Stay close to me, hyung-nim! Stay close to me no matter what!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"I have been behind you the entire time, you pig. Concentrate," I told him.

"You have to stick right behind me! Behind me!" He yelled again.

"Got it," I said.

I could tell by how he kept on checking in on us.

'This pig… '

Even though he didn't have any large injuries and the injuries he suffered were mostly shallow cuts, I was a bit worried about how the monsters kept focusing their attacks on Park Deok-Gu. After considering the things that could happen after this fight, I concluded that this fight wasn't going so well.

That was when I heard Jung Ha-Yan's spell.

"Wind Bomb."

Boom!

With that sound, the monsters were pushed back. They either hit the ground or the ceiling and because of the pressure of the wind, they splattered all over, but the situation wasn't all that great.

‘She needs to save it… ’

Jung Ha-Yan and I needed to save our mana as much as possible and even though she possessed more mana than me, she didn’t have an unlimited amount of mana.

Our party couldn’t fall before Jung Jin-Ho’s party and even though they were trying their best to block the monsters, we needed to minimize our mana consumption.

While I was thinking about what to say, I couldn’t help but smile discreetly while watching the battle.

‘Haha.’

It was probably intentional because, considering the range of Jung Ha-Yan’s magic, I found the answer I was looking for. Jung Ha-Yan’s magic landed exactly between the monsters that Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung were blocking. To make things clear, Jung Jin-Ho’s party, who was fighting on the left side, didn’t get any help from her magic, so the burden only increased for Jung Jin-Ho and his lackeys. I did feel a little bad because they were doing their best to hold them off and compared to them, we had it a bit easier.

Thanks to Jung Ha-Yan’s magic, the number of monsters decreased a lot and even though there was a brief respite, we still had no time to catch our breath.

‘Nice, Jung Ha-Yan.’

There were times when I thought she was slow-witted, but she was smarter than I thought. Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung were able to relax a bit and of course, they weren’t thinking about supporting the party on the left side.

“We need to maintain our line!”

There was no way we could maintain our lines because the party in the left area continued on their attacks.

“Catch your breath, Deok-Gu,” I told him.

“I-I was just about to do that. I survived thanks to noonim,” he said.

At this point, Jung Jin-Ho’s party was the busy one. Jung Jin-Ho was able to use magic,

but since he wanted to hide the fact that he was a magic swordsman, he didn't use his magic for his lackeys. In the end, they released hysterical screams.

"Please help us!"

"Help us out!"

"Please use the same magic you just used!"

They wanted her to use the same magic, so I glanced over Jung Ha-Yan and discreetly shook my head.

Since they had Jung Jin-Ho, they could easily block them. They might get their arms bitten or be at a disadvantage during the fight, but in this situation, they should be able to endure through all these and survive.

Yoo Seok-Woo also shouted towards Jung Ha-Yan. "Miss Ha-Yan!"

"H-Hold on. I-I'm recharging my mana…" she said.

"Damn it… ahhhh!" Yoo Seok-Woo yelled.

In the meantime, I couldn't help but exclaim when an awesome monster injured his arm, but despite that, he didn't stop swinging his sword.

Why?

Because he knew that he would die if he stopped. The situation was starting to become interesting, but it was unfortunate that I couldn't laugh out loud.

"You can do it!"

Wounds started to form on the members that were in Jung Jin-Ho's party.

'This is great. Very good.'

Even Jung Jin-Ho started getting injuries as well. He might be stronger than I imagined, but this was a place that even Kim Hyun-Sung didn't want to enter on his own. Jung Jin-Ho couldn't do everything by himself so I screamed out loud once more.

“You can do it! I believe! In all of you!”

“Are you still not ready Mr. Ki-Young?” Jung Jin-Ho asked.

“A little more…”

“Hurry!”

“You can do it. I’m sure you can block them! Please wait a bit longer,” I said.

When I screamed while attacking with my spear in a more relaxed manner, they seemed to think that we were in a really critical situation. The left party already looked away since they found it difficult to even look in our direction.

“Ack! Damn it!!”

A monster bit one of their legs, so they would probably have to participate in future fights while limping.

“Damn it, hurry! Hurry!! Your magic!” they shouted.

“I-It’s almost done!” Jung Ha-Yan said.

She already finished casting it a long time ago, so I thought it would be best to use it right as the monsters broke through their defenses, but I kind of didn’t want to help them out.

I was able to use my magic twice at most, and if I didn’t consider the things that could happen afterward, three would be my limit.

Based on the situation, it was right to help them out, but at the same time, I wanted to put pressure on them. When five people gather, there was always one person that was trash and I had a feeling that I was going to be that trash today.

“Fire ball!”

Boom!

“Gyahhhhh!”

Large balls of fire started raining down on the left side and with a loud roar, the left side obtained a moment to relax. Not only did my magic turn the monsters into balls of fire, but those that got touched by the debris were also affected. It seemed like fire-type magic was useless in this terrain.

Since I had used up a large amount of mana, I would feel slightly disappointed if it didn't have that much of an effect, at the least.

After seeing my fire magic rain down, Jung Jin-Ho's party looked a bit relieved because they thought that they could finally relax a bit. However, the aftermath of the magic didn't end there.

"Gyahhhhh!"

A frown appeared on their faces.

Everything was perfect.

They were able to relax because of my magic. They finally had the chance to rest for a moment. But there was one problem. The fire was moving between the crowd of monsters and as they got tangled up, they created an impressive fireworks display.

But the monsters only felt the pain for a moment for the only thing the monsters could think about was eating, so they started rushing towards where they were originally headed and they seemed a bit more furious than before.

"Gyahhhhh!"

I couldn't tell whether they were screaming or were excited, but the way they charged towards Jung Jin-Ho's party while being on fire was a sight to see.

'It's a burning monster, you murderers!'

"Damn it!!"

"I-I'm sorry! I-I didn't know that something like this…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

It was a type of monster that didn't exist here, so they were now facing a new type of monster.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

CHAPTER 30
QUEST (3)

“Damn it!!”

If the monster broke through our formation, we would die. If we got entangled with them, we would die. If we allowed them to invade, we would die. The only reason why this party was able to endure for so long was because of our formation.

Jung Jin-Ho’s party were definitely experienced hunters, so I was sure that they understood the certain death ramifications if these monsters broke through our formation. It must be because of that that they were trying to endure for as much as they could.

“Damn it!”

The scene where Jung Jin-Ho’s party fought against the monsters that were on fire instead of retreating was beautiful enough to bring tears to my eyes.

“I-I’m sorry,” I said.

Only a trash would plan out something like this.

With the number of monsters decreasing, the burden was bound to decrease as well. Their struggle against the monsters that were on fire was heartbreaking. They were trying their best to shove away the monsters that were on fire, but there was another issue that they had to handle. How were they going to put out the fire if it latched on them?

I was certain that the physical burden on them was immense thanks to the heat that constantly gnawed at their energy.

I could even feel the heat on our side, but I could not compare ours to Jung Jin-Ho’s party since I had no idea how hot the heat they were enduring.

“Ahhhhh!”

[Checking Monster Burning Mouth's Status Window.]

[Name - None]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 5]

[Nature - Burning Instinct]

[Job - Unemployed.]

[Stats]

[Strength - 12]

[Agility - 15]

[Stamina - 05]

[Endurance - 15]

[Luck - 10]

[Magic - 01]

I didn't know what was going on, but there was a change in the monsters' status window. It seemed like their vitality was decreasing fast, but seeing how they possessed magic, I was certain they were carrying the fire that I had just cast.

"Put the fire out, you bastards!"

Even Buddha would be furious if he was in this situation.

“I’m sorry! A bit more! Please hold out a bit more!”

It felt like I was watching holy warriors fighting against an army of hell.

In order to get rid of the monsters that were continuously rushing in, they needed to sacrifice something. Whether it was their stamina or the hidden card that Jung Jin-Ho was hiding. But seeing as how I didn’t hear him recite a spell, he probably chose the former.

‘So, you’re going to keep hiding it.’

It was a good decision to hide whatever it was he was hiding until the end, as long as his opponent wasn’t me or Kim Hyun-Sung, who had information about him.

‘What an adorable guy!’

He was so stupid that I wanted to laugh out loud.

Both Kim Hyun-Sung and I knew that Jung Jin-Ho was capable of using magic and even though I didn’t know what kind of job he would advance to in the future, I was certain that he was a magic swordsman.

His status window showed me his magic swordsman job, the things that were going to happen in the future, and the cards that Jung Jin-Ho thought were still hidden from us. Unfortunately for him, we already knew about these things. It was no different from playing poker with his hands wide open. It was hilarious watching him try his best to hide his cards when I already knew that he was holding two pairs. Not only that, but we had Kim Hyun-Sung, who could be considered as a diamond flush.

As if the world was mocking Jung Jin-Ho, the situation became worse.

“Ackkkkkk!”

“Damn it! Ki-Chul!”

“Please hold on!”

One of Jung Jin-Ho’s lackeys was named Lee Ki-Chul. For some reason, I found him likable after hearing his name.

A Burning Mouth was biting his arm and even though he was screaming, there was nothing we could do for him. In the end, it only took a moment for Lee Ki-Chul to be completely pulled into the arms of the monster. I couldn't help but frown after seeing him getting devoured by the group of monsters that were gathered within the small space.

"Ahhhhhh! Save me! Save me!" Lee Ki-Chul yelled.

"Mr. Ki-Young! Miss Ha-Yan!"

I could only use my precious mana once more and I didn't want to use it to protect Jung Jin-Ho's lackeys, although I felt a bit worried…

"A little bit! More!"

'The monsters won't break through.'

As long as Jung Jin-Ho was there, they would not be able to break through.

"Ahhhhhhhhh! Stop it! Stop! You bastards! Stop!"

There was no way for us to know whether the monsters were eating his organs or ripping his arms and legs, but one thing we were certain of was that his screams indicated the extreme pain he was undergoing. It was understandable for him to have that kind of reaction because he was being eaten alive while being scorched by fire at the same time.

'That takes care of one.'

Even with all this happening, it crossed my mind that we managed to kill one person in Jung Jin-Ho's party, but because of the thrill of the battle and the severity of the situation, I didn't feel guilty. Actually, I started smiling because this was what I wanted to happen in the first place.

"You can do it!"

'We have the advantage.'

We just made our advantageous situation even more advantageous.

“Ahhhhhhh! Ahhhhhhhh!”

“Damn it! Damn it! Ki-Chul!” Jung Jin-Ho yelled.

“Hyung-nim, isn’t this really dangerous?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Don’t worry. They won’t break through,” I answered.

I could see the end, so if we continued to endure, we would all see the end.

Unlike Jung Jin-Ho, Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t look anxious because he thought that we could overcome it.

“Heup!”

It was a repetition of simple tasks because all we had to do was block and stab them. Although our bodies felt as if we had been in a marathon for a long time.

The hand that held my spear was trembling. My breathing had turned rough, and my body was covered in sweat. I found it incredibly hard to breathe that I wanted to just throw everything aside and lie down on the ground. Unfortunately, the monsters that were charging at us gave us no respite.

‘Is this okay?’

Both Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung’s condition didn’t seem bad. Jung Jin-Ho didn’t look bad either despite the fact that they had an empty spot in their formation. Yoo Seok-Woo and the archer looked like they were tired, but not as much as me.

As the corpses of the monsters were being stacked up like a wall, the other monsters jumped over towards us and Park Deok-Gu blocked them while I stabbed them.

“Can they endure it?’

I pretended like nothing was wrong, but I couldn’t help but feel anxious because I couldn’t even see how many of them were left anymore. One thing I was certain of was that the number of roars decreased, but my loud voice started ringing.

I would say useless things like, *‘Hang on’* or *‘Just a bit longer.’*

“Heuuuup!”

I attacked with my spear as if I was using the last bit of my strength. Park Deok-Gu pushed them back using his shield with a loud scream.

“Gyahhhhh!”

When Kim Hyun-Sung quietly put his arm down, I realized that the hellish situation was over.

“It’s over,” I said.

“I-It’s over…”

I felt like I was about to collapse at any moment now.

Kim Hyun-Sung spoke while catching his breath. “Let’s start moving.”

‘Da… ’

“We haven’t completed the quest that we received a moment ago, so it’s best to start moving right away,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Ugh… hyung-nim. I can carry you if you’re unable to walk,” Park Deok-Gu offered.

“I’m fine, Deok-Gu. I can walk. Ha-Yan…” I called out.

“M-Me too oppa,” she answered.

Our party was done with the preparations, but the issue was the party on the left.

I guess they couldn’t find Ki-Chul’s body after he was dragged and killed by the monsters because I saw Jung Jin-Ho looking through the corpses that were in the front. He must have seen his comrade’s corpse, who died a horrible death because even though he dropped his head, he didn’t forget that he was hostile towards us. Jung Jin-Ho had a serious face and Yoo Seok-Woo looked at us with hostility.

“You bastard!”

The majority of Jung Jin-Ho’s hair had been burned off, and there were wounds all

over his body. After one of his lackeys named Ki-Chul got dragged off, I was certain that he retrieved the latter's sword to make up for the loss. Looking at his outer appearance, I guess he suffered a lot.

"I-I'm sorry," I said.

"Do you think apologizing is going to cut it? You bastard!" Kim Jae-Jun yelled.

"B-But… t-there was nothing I could do," I said.

"What?"

"There was nothing we could do in that situation. Besides fire magic, I'm not experienced in other spells and if I didn't use my magic, we probably would have suffered even more. We didn't have enough time for Ha-Yan to use her magic and I didn't think the monsters would stick to each other to make the fire spread. It was the best I could do. A-Also… the number of monsters has definitely decreased after I used it," I explained.

There were mistakes, but we tried and if it wasn't for me, then we wouldn't have managed to endure up to this point. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan and I could have used all of our mana to get out of this situation, but using our mana to save him did more harm than good.

Of course from Jung Jin-Ho's point of view, he probably didn't think that Ki-Chul would retire this fast. It was his fault.

The fire was a bit overpowering and because it spread, it did kill Ki-Chul, however, if it wasn't for me, then we wouldn't have gotten this far. Although, I did spread the fire intentionally…

'Right.'

There was no need for Jung Jin-Ho to know that.

"How could you say that…" he said.

"I had no choice. I do feel bad that Mr. Ki-Chul died, but… right now…" I stopped.

He was getting angry at others for his own mistakes and it was understandable for

him to think that this was ridiculous.

I was certain that he wanted to point an arrow or a spear towards me, but…

Seeing him approach us with a frown did scare me a bit, so I looked at Park Deok-Gu and shook my head. When I signaled him not to interfere, he nodded.

“I’m really, really sorry. But… there was nothing I could do,” I said.

“Y-You… you…”

No matter how you looked at him, he looked like a neighborhood bully and I knew exactly what kind of people they were.

‘Intermittent Explosive Disorder.’

They only show this disorder to people they believe were weaker than them.

“I’m really sorry, but we’re alive, aren’t we?” I asked.

When I showed a satisfied smile so small that only the people close to me could see it, Kim Jae-Jun couldn't suppress his anger and punched me. Obviously, I didn’t dodge because there needed to be some kind of conflict.

When he punched, my body fell to the side, and not only did I feel zoned out for a moment, but I could taste blood in my mouth. I didn’t need to act because my extremely weak body *naturally* fell on the ground.

“Hyung-nim! You bastard!” Park Deok-Gu yelled.

He sounded like he was surprised.

“I’m fine, Deok-Gu. I’m the one that made the mistake,” I told him.

I didn’t forget to act like the victim that wanted to stop Park Deok-Gu.

“Mr. Jae-Jun, please stop,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“B-But…”

“I understand how you’re feeling, but we should stop here since having more conflict won’t do us any good,” he explained.

‘Right, conflict isn’t good.’

I was sure that Jung Jin-Ho didn’t want to create conflict in a situation like this.

When I spat out what was in my mouth, I saw a tooth with blood on it falling out.

‘Ugh… ’

“Are you okay, Mr. Ki-Young?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“Yes, I’m fine, Mr. Hyun-Sung. It was my mistake. There was nothing I could do. I’m sorry,” I said.

No wonder my mouth was hurting so badly.

Kim Hyun-Sung didn’t say much but seeing him putting his guard up while looking at them probably helped him realize that I wasn’t the one that made the mistake. Even the way he displayed his worry for me looked so warm.

The comrade of Kim Hyun-Sung, the regressor, had such a warm ring to it.

With this, I was able to confirm that I was in the safest spot, but an unexpected problem came from a completely different side.

‘Oh… ’

Jung Ha-Yan was staring at Kim Jae-Jun, one of Jung Jin-Ho’s lackeys, with a serious look.

‘…We’ve got a problem.’

CHAPTER 31
QUEST (4)

No matter how you looked at it, it was my fault and it was a messed up thing to do because it seemed like I had planned it out. I was certain that if Solomon came and gave me his judgment, he would call me a sinner.

Despite choosing to gamble with the possibility of losing my reputation points with Kim Hyun-Sung, the situation didn't turn out so bad.

The man named Lee Ki-Chul disappeared into a monster's belly and one of Jung Jin-Ho's lackeys was now looking at me in fury as if he was going to kill me.

A conflict had started and Kim Hyun-Sung's reaction wasn't so bad either. I wasn't sure if he was aware of the fact that I had intentionally created this situation, but he was satisfied with the result. Lee Ki-Chul was sent to his death without Hyun-Sung having to dirty his hands.

Risking myself and becoming the victim caused me to lose a tooth. But in exchange, I acquired the loving affection of my precious comrades. The rewards far outweighed the risk, the result was beautiful.

However, I didn't expect Jung Ha-Yan to display that kind of look again. From what I knew, I wasn't allowed to make physical contact with the opposite sex.

'Was this not allowed either?'

It seemed that she also couldn't allow me to get hit.

Jung Ha-Yan bit her nails for a moment and after realizing that I was still on the floor, she quickly ran towards me without abandoning her hostility towards Kim Jae-Jun.

"O-Oppa!" she called out.

But when she saw blood spilling out of my mouth, she became absent-minded. She even started touching her ring; it was a sight to see her trying to use her magic The

Divine Healing ring that she was wearing wasn't used to heal the kind of injuries that I had, so when I lightly grabbed her left hand, she must have realized that I was hinting at her not to recite the spell.

Her eyes were filled with tears as they continued to fall from her large eyes.

"A-Are you okay? What… what should I do?" she asked.

"Of course, I'm okay. It's my fault, so… it can't be helped," I answered.

The inside of my mouth tasted bitter. One side of my cheek was numb because of the tooth that fell out, but I couldn't show them that I was in pain because if I exaggerated it, I felt like Jung Ha-Yan would suddenly use her magic on Jung Jin-Ho's group.

'Please suppress it… I beg you.'

It wouldn't be a bad choice for our side to use magic first, but it would be best to move forward with this plan while I continued to act like I was the victim.

Seeing as how Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't making a move, I was sure that this was what he wanted as well.

"*Hiccup*…"

The way Jung Ha-Yan kept touching my face made it seem like the world was coming to an end. Not only was she choking up, but she also started to show signs of a panic attack, so I became curious whether she could actually stay sane.

Her face was covered in tears and snot and if the others saw this, they probably would have thought that I died. Her reaction was simply too much considering the fact that I only lost a tooth.

"Are you okay? You are okay, right? *Hiccup*… o-okay?"

"Yes, I'm okay. It's nothing, so don't worry Ha-Yan. I'm fine, I'm really okay. It doesn't hurt at all," I answered.

It did hurt, but it wasn't a huge wound. I felt somewhat grateful that she was showing this kind of reaction to me for a small injury, but on the other hand, she

looked a bit scary.

“You jerk! How dare you!”

Truthfully, I only got hit because I made a mistake, but Park Deok-Gu was also expressing his anger. However, the reaction that Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu were showing was probably worse than what Jung Jin-Ho imagined.

At this point, I was sure that Jung Jin-Ho was baffled, but I was also certain that the man that hit me was even more baffled than him. When the atmosphere suddenly turned violent, they felt something ominous. The grim situation earlier had just ended, but Jung Ha-Yan’s reaction created a new source of conflict.

Even though there was an error in the process, it wasn’t a bad way to take control.

The situation turned into something more magical than the magic that I used.

‘Pfft.’

I knew that I shouldn’t laugh, but I couldn’t help but smile. Despite knowing that I shouldn’t show this kind of expression, I couldn’t stop smiling.

In the end, Jung Jin-Ho’s side was the one that lowered their heads.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Ki-Young,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“It’s nothing,” I said.

“I have no words to describe how I’m feeling. I know you didn’t do it with bad intentions and if you didn’t use your magic, we could have been in a situation worse than this. I think Mr. Jae-Jun felt a bit angry since he had spent a long time with Mr. Ki-Chul, and he had to see him die. I hope you’ll understand. Mr. Jae-Jun?” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“But…” Kim Jae-Jun said.

“Mr. Jae-Jun, please apologize. There was nothing they could do in that situation and it was the best option. If it wasn’t for Mr. Ki-Young, then we could’ve all died,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

I wasn't sure if he was aware of Jung Jin-Ho's decision, but the man named Jae-Jun, who still had a frown on his face, bowed in the end.

"I-I let my emotions get to me for a moment. I'm… sorry," Kim Jae-Jun said.

His fist was shaking. I guess it was difficult for him to continue talking because he couldn't look at me properly. Based on the situation, he probably knew that he had to apologize, but the words simply wouldn't come out of his mouth.

I think that based on his nature, he had a difficult time apologizing, to begin with, and he didn't seem apologetic at all. He actually looked like he was trying to suppress his anger.

"It's okay, Mr. Jae-Jun, I completely understand. I acted a bit rashly too, and… I'm sure there aren't any words that could comfort you, but I'm truly sorry," I said.

I didn't mean it, of course.

"I'm… sorry."

I saw him forcing his head down, so it didn't feel like he was actually apologizing to me, but despite that, I was in a good mood.

'Pfft.'

If he didn't have an intermittent explosive disorder, then the person that had to keep his head low would have been me, but honestly, I was more worried about Jung Ha-Yan's presence than his.

'This… '

If Jung Ha-Yan was thinking about doing the same thing she did during the Park Hye-Young incident, then things would be awkward on our side because I already hinted that Jung Jin-Ho was the culprit for Park Hye-Young's case.

If she suddenly disappeared with Jung Jin-Ho's lackey and we found him with his limbs cut off, then Kim Hyun-Sung might become suspicious of Jung Ha-Yan. Of course, I would become suspicious as well.

I wanted to stop her, but seeing her expression, I did not think that simply stopping

her would work. She clenched her fist so hard that the palm of her hand injured her nails. It felt she was treating her palm as Jae-Jun and her nails were her attacks.

'Not bad.'

If I were to think a bit positively about it, it wasn't so bad. Simply put, if Jung Ha-Yan moved on her own, then that would be advantageous to me too. After all, if Kim Jae-Jun died, then it would be no different from Jung Jin-Ho losing everything.

'Why is she… '

However, I saw Jung Ha-Yan discreetly picking up my tooth that fell out. Seeing that made her seem like a ticking time bomb.

"Let's start moving, Mr. Ki-Young," Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

"Yes, let's do that. I'm sorry for all the fuss," I said.

When I was trying to get up, Kim Hyun-Sung wrapped my arm around his shoulder as if he was trying to support me, but my injuries were light. However, sticking together like this was the appropriate move because it was our side that needed to decide when to pull the trigger.

He didn't want Jung Jin-Ho's group to see his weird side, so if I was next to him, then he would be able to suppress it.

"Can you walk?" he asked.

"Of course," I answered.

"If you're tired, then…"

"No, I'm really okay. Like you've mentioned Mr. Hyun-Sung, we need to get out of here," I said, interrupting him.

"Okay."

The iron gate was still shut tight. It may not open until we were done with the quest or it may only be opened from the outside, but one thing I was sure of was that in order for us to survive, we needed to complete all the quests that were in this

dungeon and coincidentally, the name of this quest was *survival*.

“Maybe the survival or the control that the woman was referring to were the quests within this dungeon,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

He said something in order to freshen up the atmosphere because our eyes, including Jung Ha-Yan, were on Jung Jin-Ho and his lackeys.

It was natural for him to make an effort to try and close the distance between us. I thought about how his actions didn’t fit his nature, but he said something afterward that I was also thinking about.

“I had the same thought. There’s nothing on the first floor, so it looks like survival and control of this place is the main quest. If the condition for survival means escaping from this place and either avoiding or winning against the monsters, then that means we’ll be completing the control quest as well. If my assumption is correct, then this first floor is truly a meaningless place,” I explained.

No matter what happened, we had to survive and control this place at the same time.

When I glanced over at Kim Hyun-Sung, he didn’t seem to disagree. I was sure that he wasn’t able to concentrate on the conversation since he was taking the lead in trying to find a way out. But when I saw how he didn’t say anything, his assumption must be the same as mine.

When the woman on the first floor mentioned survival and control, we had to complete those two within this place.

“I understand the survival part, but…”

“There may be a boss within this place,” I said.

“Oh.”

“It’s pretty common in dungeons. If you look at your status window and jobs, it’s pretty similar to an online game. If this wasn’t a tutorial, there may be several conditions when it comes to taking control, but if this dungeon is only meant to simply focus on survival and control, then there may be a different type of monster around. Killing that monster may fulfill the control part of the quest,” I explained.

“I agree with you, Mr. Ki-Young,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“It’s only a simple speculation on my part, but for the second task, there may be an option to find a path,” I said.

“You’re talking about a way out of this place,” Jung Jin-Ho said.

“Yes, it can be a way out or it may lead us to a device that will help us get out of this place. I’m sure there’s a few more, but I can’t think of them right now, I said.

It didn’t matter if those weren’t the case because they were only assumptions, and it was nothing more than me throwing out ideas that were in my head. It seemed like Jung Jin-Ho and even Yoo Seok-Woo were thinking about the same thing, but the difference was that I said something out loud while they kept their opinions to themselves.

“It looks like you’ve been thinking about a lot of things. Mr. Ki-Young…” Yoo Seok-Woo mumbled.

I felt a bit of hostility in his words because it felt like he was asking whether I intentionally threw the fire ball, but I just laughed it off because Jung Jin-Ho’s group was also out to kill us.

“It’s just your imagination,” I said.

As we continued walking, we couldn’t find the monsters that we saw earlier. Of course, I did see some from time to time, but it wasn’t to the point that it was the same as the fight we had earlier. We took care of them as fast as we could in order to avoid any disturbance and the incident that happened earlier didn’t happen again.

Due to being low on stamina, we moved very slowly, but… we were able to relax a little bit and during that time, the fact that my mana was constantly being replenished was amusing to me.

There were times when Kim Hyun-Sung would frown and Jung Ha-Yan would stare at Kim Jae-Jun, but luckily, nothing happened. In Jung Ha-Yan’s case, I wasn’t sure why she was so depressed and furious, but whenever she saw my swollen mouth, she would often cry and mumble to herself while shaking her head.

Whenever she randomly cried, Park Deok-Gu was the one that felt a bit surprised.

Unlike the time when he proudly told me that he was used to women, he seemed like he didn't know how to comfort Jung Ha-Yan because no matter how you looked at it, the way she was acting was strange. Honestly, what was more surprising than her tears was the way she was whispering while keeping her head down. Her whispers were so quiet that even I couldn't hear her despite being so close to her. Based on the words that I heard from time to time…

I think I heard her say, *'I need to kill'* but I pretended that I didn't hear anything because that would probably be more beneficial to me.

"I'll get revenge for you."

I was sure that pretending not to hear her was the best decision.

CHAPTER 32
QUEST (5)

"Do you think there's something outside?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Well… don't you think the food out there is more delicious than what we're eating here?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"*Sob…*"

"…"

"…"

"I told you that I'm fine," I told Jung Ha-Yan.

The people that were talking to each other became quiet, and it was because of the event that was happening.

Jung Ha-Yan was not able to hold back her tears after staring at me because she started crying again. She wasn't as emotional as the first time, but sometimes, she would release large droplets of tears, and every time I saw that, I felt a bit weird.

Of course, the situation wasn't bad because Kim Jae-Jun and Jung Jin-Ho were watching us.

In order to make the *harmonious* atmosphere of the party last longer, we exchanged several conversations, but when Jung Ha-Yan kept on crying like this, the atmosphere became slightly gloomy. If an outsider saw us, they would probably think that it was me that died, not Lee Ki-Chul.

Jung Ha-Yan's glares at Kim Jae-Jun became a normal occurrence, and I couldn't imagine just how uncomfortable he felt right now.

At this point, Jung Jin-Ho's party had no choice but to obey us because after Lee Ki-Chul got involved in an unexpected accident, the balance between our powers had

tipped over. His party seemed like they gave up on hunting us. Unless an unexpected opportunity opened up for them, it seemed like they had decided that it would be best to just go along with capturing the dungeon.

'I would've done the same thing if I was in their position.'

If I was in Jung Jin-Ho's place, I would have given up on the plan to kill Kim Hyun-Sung's party. But at the same time, this was the reason why they were so sensitive at the slightest conflict.

"I'm really sorry," Jung Jin-Ho said.

"It's fine, Mr. Jin-Ho. I'm a bit embarrassed because I'm not in the position to keep receiving apologies like this," Kim Jae-Jun said.

Seeing as how Jung Jin-Ho kept apologizing to Kim Jae-Jun, I could tell that they were being overly sensitive.

"I… overreacted," he said.

"It's understandable and once again, I'm sorry about what happened," Jung Jin-Ho said.

I didn't know what kind of conversation they were having, but every time Jung Jin-Ho apologized, Kim Jae-Jun also apologized back to him.

The problem was that Jung Ha-Yan's hostility towards them was gradually growing as time went on.

"W-Why are you sorry…"

She started talking to herself more and more as if she wanted me to listen. I was worried that she might actually spill out her actual feelings, but I was sure that she would be able to differentiate between what she could say and what she could not.

Yoo Seok-Woo's reaction was a bit amusing.

"…"

When I first revealed that Jung Ha-Yan and I had a close relationship, he looked like

he was in a bad mood and as expected, when Jung Ha-Yan and I started traveling together, he started to show how uncomfortable he was. I was sure that he also realized how much Jung Ha-Yan thought about me every time she cried to the point of having swollen eyes.

'Yoo Seok-Woo… '

From the beginning, he was nothing more and nothing less than a sex offender to Jung Ha-Yan and as the person that only made an attempt, he was one of the people I was surprised to see here. After thinking about what Yoo Seok-Woo did, I would understand if he started hanging out with a group of criminals, but I had a feeling that Jung Jin-Ho's group must have promised him something.

That was probably how he got a job. By partying with them, he could probably earn experience or maybe even… Jung Ha-Yan.

He was probably excited at the thought of winning back his lover once he completed this hunt successfully, but since his plan was close to going down the drain, I understood why he was looking at me with jealousy.

Anyways, it was their party's plan to make it seem like we were going to move in that direction. A beautiful party that had minimal conflicts, no quarrels, and no fighting. We were able to get this kind of result because Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Jae-Jun started obeying us, but unfortunately, I wasn't planning on getting along with them.

Kim Hyun-Sung sometimes looked like he was deep into his thoughts and I hoped that it wasn't about how he could get rid of Jung Jin-Ho because they killed Park Hye-Young, and it was only right for them to die in a place like this.

When thinking about the reaction that Kim Hyun-Sung showed when he first saw Jung Jin-Ho, this was less likely to happen.

Jung Jin-Ho, Yoo Seok-Woo, and Kim Jae-Jun were still wearing their facade and if our party attacked them first in a place like this, Kim Hyun-Sung would be the one that would go crazy. I was certain that he at least didn't want to show his other side to me and the others, so it was possible that he was waiting for an opportunity or a way to justify his further actions. No, I was certain that this was what he had in mind. When Kim Hyun-Sung occasionally frowned, he looked like he was either thinking about when to kill them or a way to justify their deaths.

'Is it okay to help him?'

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he needed help. He was trying to make a plausible situation or a situation where it would just be Jung Jin-Ho's group and him.

For example…

'Getting attacked first.'

Since that was probably the most ideal.

The heroes of justice that fought against a group of cowardly criminals who ambushed them had a nice ring to it. The problem was that Jung Jin-Ho and his lackeys, who lost Lee Ki-Chul, probably wouldn't attack us first.

But one of them had intermittent explosive disorder while the other was a man drowning in jealousy. This task was probably going to be so easy that I could probably sleep through it.

'Provoking is my specialty.'

Especially when it came to Yoo Seok-Woo since he had just recently joined Jung Jin-Ho's party. There was a good chance that Jung Jin-Ho had never seen all sides of him.

It only took a moment to plan out my thoughts.

First, using Jung Ha-Yan to provoke him wouldn't be a bad idea.

I didn't have any big plans.

"Oh…"

But… Physical contact. This should be enough.

"Oppa…" Jung Ha-Yan whispered.

She sounded a bit surprised, but she didn't bother moving the position of my hand. I guess just having my hand between her waist and pelvis area was enough to make her feel a little bit nervous. Someone might think that I was walking while supporting myself using Jung Ha-Yan.

I was sure that both Jung Ha-Yan and Yoo Seok-Woo were the only ones that found the position of my hand confusing to look at. It was because it wasn't on her waist, her pelvis, or her buttocks. Despite placing my hand on a spot that was difficult to describe, I still got a reaction.

'Pfft… '

I could feel Yoo Seok-Woo's furious gaze.

"Oh, Ha-Yan. Sorry…" I said.

"I-It's okay. You can grab… wherever you feel comfortable…" she said.

"Still…"

"It's okay…" she said.

His miserable face looked as if I had just stolen the girlfriend that he loved so dearly. Even while Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Jin-Ho, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Jae-Jun were talking about the dungeon, Yoo Seok-Woo kept his eyes on me.

When I discreetly moved my hand lower, Jung Ha-Yan lowered her head and smiled.

'She's enjoying it a lot… '

I didn't expect this kind of reaction, but on the other hand, Yoo Seok-Woo looked as if he was furious the moment our eyes met… It was obvious, but…

I didn't forget to smile.

'I know you're jealous.'

He must have seen through my thoughts without me saying it. Sometimes, actions and expressions were a great way to have a discreet conversation.

"Thanks, Ha-Yan. Aren't you tired?" I asked.

"No! I'm fine. Compared to what you have done, this is nothing," she answered.

The guy acted like a clown in order to hold and touch Jung Ha-Yan and to him, it

would seem like I was touching all over her body. Thus, it was reasonable for him to react that way.

It didn't really matter whether he was serious about her or not, although, I have a feeling that he was serious after recalling how pathetic he looked back then, but…

'This feels good.'

He was the one that started this and I had lots more to show him. I wanted to show him her eyes that were worried about me, and the sweet voice that she used to talk to me. Even though her voice didn't sound so sweet to me, her voice sounded like she had put honey all over it, so I was sure that this would hurt his heart even more.

'I'll hold her hand.'

And press my body against hers. I would then place my hand either on her waist or shoulder to maintain the right amount of tension.

'Conversation between bodies is good.'

It was a conversation method that could cause sexual tension.

Jung Ha-Yan's face had already turned as red as possible and despite that, the smile on her face didn't go away. I thought about stopping since her breathing was getting rough, but…

I couldn't stop. In the end, I guess Yoo Seok-Woo couldn't handle it anymore because he started talking to her.

"Miss Ha-Yan, you look really tired… I-I can,"

"…"

"Pfft."

I couldn't help but smirk after seeing Jung Ha-Yan completely ignoring him. His face turned red, just like Jung Ha-Yan's, but it was for a different reason compared to hers.

Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Jin-Ho, and Park Deok-Gu looked back at us because of the small commotion and when Park Deok-Gu noticed Jung Ha-Yan's ragged breaths, he

spoke. “Hey noonim, we can switch if you’re tired…”

“Yeah, Ha-Yan. I didn’t get hurt that badly and…”

“Oh! No! I-I’ll do it. Me… together…” she answered.

“Well, it looks like noonim wants to stick with hyung-nim… but if you get tired, you have to let me know,” he said.

“I will,” she said.

Park Deok-Gu intercepted at the perfect time. It was the same thing as showing that it was Jung Ha-Yan that wanted this, not me.

When I placed my hand on her waist and looked behind, my eyes met Yoo Seok-Woo’s eyes.

Smirk.

He looked at my smile. I knew he was having a hard time enduring it.

“It feels pretty good,” I said.

“Sorry?” she asked.

“It’s nothing, Ha-Yan,” I told her.

“Okay…”

I saw Yoo Seok-Woo trembling. It was obvious that if he had self-control, then he wouldn’t have done something like that back at the shelter.

If Yoo Seok-Woo was by himself, then it would have been difficult for him to endure.

He grabbed his sword tightly and it seemed like he immediately wanted to stab me, but he ultimately held it in. I wanted to compliment him for doing that. I wasn’t sure if he wasn’t provoked enough or was looking for the opportunity, but I was sure that he needed both. Looking back once more, I grabbed Jung Ha-Yan’s waist.

“Gyahhhhh!”

“Let’s get ready to fight.”

A good opportunity came at the right time.

I grabbed my spear weakly and Jung Ha-Yan stepped away from me briefly and started reciting a spell. Park Deok-Gu, Jung Jin-Ho, and Kim Hyun-Sung still had no idea as to what was going on since their eyes were focused up ahead.

“Hehehe…”

I mumbled so that only Yoo Seok-Woo could hear me.

“You’re jealous, right?” I asked.

“You…”

“Ha-Yan feels really soft,” I said.

I couldn’t stop grinning as the corner of my lips went up.

“There’s five, so let’s get ready to fight! We’ll do it as quickly as possible!”

“You bastard!!!”

The moment Yoo Seok-Woo raised his sword, I contemplated whether I should run since his blade was aimed directly at my stomach…

‘It’s better to get attacked.’

I could survive his attack. With the healing ring that Jung Ha-Yan had, I could recover from a sword wound like this. As I got stabbed, I started to feel goosebumps.

“Ahhhhhh!”

The pain couldn’t be compared to the pain that I felt when I got punched in the face.

I couldn’t help but scream in pain as the blade felt like a hot iron rod.

It went without saying that everyone’s eyes fell on me. Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Jae-Jun looked as if they didn’t know what was going on, but they knew that something had

happened.

Yoo Seok-Woo stabbed me.

I was worried that maybe Jung Jin-Ho was going to label him as a crazy person and abandon him, but…

When he screamed, I realized that I worried for no reason.

“I… I! Did it! Jin-Ho hyung-nim! Jae-Jun hyung-nim! I killed this bastard!”

He sounded too dignified for someone that killed the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings.

Out of the cards that Jung Jin-Ho was holding, at least one was a perfect landmine.

CHAPTER 33
ENEMY (1)

From Jung Jin-Ho's perspective, I was sure that this situation was completely ridiculous.

"W-What kind of… bullshit is this? Mr. Seok-Woo," he said.

"I did it! This b-bastard! I stabbed him! Hyung-nim!" Yoo Seok-Woo yelled.

"You crazy bastard!"

The place became loud for a moment and Jung Jin-Ho immediately took his sword out. Of course, I didn't think he was trying to attack us.

'He's trying to kill him.'

He may try to kill Yoo Seok-Woo in order to rectify the situation. I was sure he wanted to kill him so that he wouldn't talk anymore, then he would handle the ramifications later. This was the only choice that Jung Jin-Ho had at the moment.

I was sure that he didn't want to tussle with us in a place like this.

If Kim Hyun-Sung or Park Deok-Gu were the ones that got stabbed, Jung Jin-Ho may have a chance, but it was really unfortunate that it was me, Lee Ki-Young, the weakest of our party.

'I can't let them kill him.'

I instinctively looked at Kim Hyun-Sung and saw him moving fast. Kim Jae-Jun, one of Jung Jin-Ho's lackeys, looked as if he wasn't really good at figuring out the situation because when Jung Jin-Ho started dashing, he took that as a signal to fight and started running towards me while holding his sword.

"You little piece of shit! You killed him! You killed Ki-Chul!" he yelled.

It was true that I was the one who killed Lee Ki-Chul, but I didn't expect him to leave Deok-Gu alone and charge towards me. I guess I officially became the most popular person of this party while we were doing the control quest.

I was someone who needed to be safely protected from the back, but I had instantly become the main tank and what was unexpected was that Park Deok-Gu had become slow at figuring out the situation. I thought he would at least block the second attack, but he didn't block Kim Jae-Jun when he started charging towards me with his dagger.

'Damn it.'

It felt like Jae-Jun was going for my head, so using my reflexes, I crouched down and his dagger landed on my back.

'That hurts!'

"Ahhhhh!"

It hurts.

Park Deok-Gu realized what was happening after the second attack happened. Not only did he push Kim Jae-Jun back using his large shield, but he started blocking my front with a pale face.

Yoo Seok-Woo, who was behind, seemed a bit confused by the sudden situation and not only that, but his body was trembling while holding the sword he used to stab me. As expected, he wasn't used to stabbing someone and right now, Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Hyun-Sung were more important than the lackeys.

"It's a misunder…"

Before he could finish, their swords crossed.

'That's it.'

Boom! The moment I heard that sound, I saw Jung Jin-Ho flying all the way back.

The battle commenced.

The script had been completed and the two were placed on stage and the only thing left to do was rectifying this situation.

I wanted to ask Jung Ha-Yan to quickly heal me, but the problem was that I couldn't say the words. This was my first time feeling this type of pain and besides my scream, I couldn't say anything else. I thought her healing magic was going to be used on me, but instead, I heard Jung Ha-Yan's scream

"Noooooooo!"

'It hurts... '

"You bastards! Hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

I wish she would heal me instead of screaming.

The situation was unfolding very quickly, so I couldn't pay attention to what was going on. Monsters were charging towards us from the front and Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Hyun-Sung were fighting with their swords. Park Deok-Gu wasn't sure whether he should be protecting my front or my back since Yoo Seok-Woo was behind me, but I could tell that he was trying his best to protect me.

"Hyung-nim! Hyung-nim!!"

"I'm not dead yet…" I said.

"Noonim! The ring! The ring! Please hurry up and recite! The ring!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

"Wahhhhhhh! Oppa! Oppa! Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan cried out.

"Calm down and use the ring! The ring!

"Oh!"

I expected Jung Ha-Yan to panic, but the situation was worse than I thought. After Park Deok-Gu grabbed Jung Ha-Yan's hand tightly, she must've realized what kind of item she had.

"H-Healing! Healing!" she yelled.

A light poured on me and even though my body didn't heal instantly, the strangely pleasing light was healing my wound. The pain was still there, but the blood spewing out from my wound had disappeared.

'I almost died.'

If Jung Ha-Yan was a little bit late, I might have died.

"Oppa. Oppa. Oppa." Jung Ha-Yan called out.

"H-Hyung-nim!" Park Deok-Gu called out.

"I'm… okay," I said.

My body felt a bit light, so I looked around again and saw Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Jin-Ho quietly fighting. Anyone could tell that Kim Hyun-Sung was more experienced.

Of course, I wasn't thinking about hearing their excuses.

In the end, the main villain abandoned both Yoo Seok-Woo and Kim Jae-Jun as he started running away from this place. Kim Hyun-Sung looked at us for a moment and quickly started talking while nodding.

"Mr. Deok-Gu! Miss Ha-Yan! Please take care of Mr. Ki-Young. I'll take care of Jung Jin-Ho…"

"O-Okay, bro!" Park Deok-Gu answered.

He believed that we would be able to take care of things here. Since the two of them had high agility stats, it only took them a moment to disappear from my sight. Kim Jae-Jun must have realized that the situation had arrived at a point of no return because he looked like he was trying to escape, but he didn't bother taking Yoo Seok-Woo with him.

If this situation continued, Park Deok-Gu would be the one that would be forced to block the monsters.

"You jerks!"

I saw Yoo Seok-Woo swinging his sword again and of course this time, no one got

injured because Park Deok-Gu struck him with his shield.

Thud!

Yoo Seok-Woo's body went flying in the air before colliding with a wall. At the same time, the monsters started charging into this place.

"Magic Shield!"

This was the second insurance that Kim Hyun-Sung prepared. It successfully blocked the monsters as it only took a moment for him to recite a spell.

Even though Kim Jae-Jun and Jung Jin-Ho were no longer in our sights, Kim Hyun-Sung should be able to catch both of them.

No.

"H-Hyung-nim, noonim is gone…" Park Deok-Gu said.

Jung Ha-Yan was going to capture Kim Jae-Jun.

"Don't worry, Deok-Gu. We'll follow them after we take care of the monsters that are in front of us first since I know where they're headed," I said.

"That's a relief, but…"

I also didn't see how Jung Ha-Yan disappeared, but she recited a spell during that time and followed Kim Jae-Jun. I wasn't sure if she would be able to catch up to him since his agility stats were high, but seeing how she quickly disappeared without us knowing, I was certain that she was going to come back after taking care of her problem.

Maybe it was because we faced an unexpected situation, but Park Deok-Gu started crying. I thought that seeing me lying on the ground with blood spilling out from my wound must have shocked him until he was reduced to tears, so I talked while looking at him.

"Stop crying, you pig."

"W-Who's crying?" he asked.

The dagger might have stabbed me because he spaced out, but the outcome wasn't that bad.

* * *

'Damn it.'

Kim Jae-Jun didn't know what was going on.

'Yoo Seok-Woo, you idiot, you trash.'

He believed that they shouldn't have let him join their party, no. Yoo Seok-Woo wasn't the only idiot. He thought that he was an idiot too because when Jung Jin-Ho pulled out his sword, he thought that it was the signal to attack, so he made his move with his dagger.

He thought that he should have been more objective.

Lee Ki-Chul was his friend who traveled with him for a long time, and when that jerk Lee Ki-Young killed his friend, he couldn't suppress his anger.

'I knew we had to cancel our plan… '

It was because that bastard would apologize with empty words and show that smile of his.

He knew that he needed to control himself, but he couldn't hold it in.

That expression, that expression of Lee Ki-Young was the problem. He looked as if he was mocking and openly provoking them. The problem was his eyes and smile that looked as if he was underestimating them.

Kim Jae-Jun was filled with anger and he just happened to find Lee Ki-Young who had been stabbed. The moment Kim Jae-Jun saw him watching the situation with a strange amused expression, he couldn't hold back anymore.

That bastard Jung Jin-Ho was the problem.

From the beginning, Kim Jae-Jun thought there was no such thing as camaraderie with him, but he didn't think that Jung Jin-Ho would abandon him just like that.

'It doesn't matter.'

What happened didn't matter anymore since they only met because they needed each other. Since Jung Jin-Ho was using him, all he had to do was to use him too. It was simple.

'First.'

He had to escape from this place since Jung Jin-Ho determined that there was no chance of them winning in the situation just now.

Since Kim Jae-Jun knew the paths, he wouldn't have any trouble catching up to Jung Jin-Ho and even now, the traces of his escape were clearly visible. He thought about following Jung Jin-Ho so that both of them could take care of Kim Hyun-Sung at the same time. Once they were done, he could then take matters into his own hands.

He thought that his anger wouldn't subside unless he had personally ripped Lee Ki-Young to shreds.

But when he grabbed his bow and arrow and tried to move as fast as possible…

'What the.'

The path looked different from what he had memorized. He was certain this wasn't the path that he knew. After changing his job to an archer, this was the first time that he experienced something like this.

He wondered if there was a problem within the dungeon itself, but he was sure that it wasn't the case.

Traces of Jung Jin-Ho and Kim Hyun-Sung were cut off on one side of the wall.

"What the…"

When he looked around, he felt an unknown wind blowing.

"Um…"

It was moments later when he felt one of his legs falling off.

“Ahhhhhhh!!”

‘What… what… is this!’

Kim Jae-Jun didn’t know what was going on. After the wind blew from somewhere, one of his legs fell off. There wasn’t a person alive who wouldn’t be scared when they didn’t even know who attacked them.

“Ahhhhhh!”

When the wind blew again, his wrist got cut off.

“What! What’s going ooooooooon?!”

The presence of magic popped into his head.

When he looked around again, he saw a woman revealing herself within the shadow. He thought that this was his first time seeing this woman, but when he looked at her closely, he realized that he had seen her before.

‘Jung Ha-Yan?’

Her face was really red.

‘Her eyes… ’

Her eyes were strange, her hair and her clothes were a mess. Kim Jae-Jun saw her wiping away her tears using her hand.

“I won’t a-apologize to you,” she said.

“What…”

“I'll never forgive you. You… dummy! I-I need to kill them all. I need to kill everyone that hurts my oppa,” she said.

“What kind of bullshit… ahhhhhh!”

“S-Shut up! Shut that mouth of yours! Y-You idiot! I’m sure he was in a lot of pain. My oppa… *sob*… I’m sure it hurt a lot. When he got punched earlier… I’m sure he was in

pain."

It didn't take him long to realize what was going on. The woman that was in front of him wasn't normal.

'Damn it… damn it… '

He immediately realized that he had messed with the wrong person.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she was obsessed with that bastard Lee Ki-Young, but he never imagined that she was this crazy.

He heard her whispering a spell, and of course, his body sensed something ominous. He wanted to get out of this situation by crawling, but he couldn't. This place was too big for him to escape by crawling.

He could feel the woman's weak hand grabbing his hair and pulling his head up.

"I-It's unfortunate that I have to end this quickly since I don't have time. My oppa… I need to pay back ten times over for the suffering he experienced… but I can't do that. *Sob*…"

"Spare me… I… I only did what I was told," Kim Jae-Jun said.

"I don't believe in liars… Air Bomb," Jung Ha-Yan said.

The spell that was in her right hand was magic that he had seen before. It was the spell that had crushed a lot of monsters. Back then, the spell was as big as a person's head, but now, it was very small.

While he was trying to figure out what was going on, he heard the voice of the crazy woman again.

"Open your mouth."

"Wh… what…"

"Say… ahh. Y-You need to feel the same pain. You need to feel how much pain my oppa experienced," she said.

He unknowingly kept his mouth shut. It was difficult for him to imagine what that spell was going to do if it was placed in his mouth. However, the crazy woman forcefully lowered his chin and placed the small bomb in his mouth. He was going crazy due to the foreign object that was forcefully placed in his mouth.

Cold sweat continued to form on his body as he trembled in primal fear.

Before he could think about the things that could happen afterward, he heard an explosion that shook his brain.

Boom!

“Aaaaaaaaaack!”

The fragments of his teeth burst in his mouth, piercing through his tongue, neck, the roof of his mouth, and cheeks. It was difficult for him to understand what was going on. One thing he was sure of was that it felt like the pain was melting his brain.

“It hurts, right? You’re in pain too. So why… did you do that?” she asked.

‘Crazy bitch… crazy bitch… crazy bitch… ’

“You’re spitting out blood, you dummy,” she commented.

“Spare… aaaaaack sa…”

Watching her tidy herself up was bizarre. She fixed her messy hair and wiped the blood that was on her face using her sleeve.

“I need to finish this quickly, so… this will be the last. Don’t do this next time,” she warned.

All he could think about was begging her not to do this anymore and to spare him.

He couldn’t speak properly because of the fear he felt and he was slowly losing consciousness. He tried to stop himself from fainting because he wanted to live, but then he heard a voice that was bound to be the last voice he was going to hear.

“Oh… he died.”

CHAPTER 34
ENEMY (2)

“Stop crying, you pig,” I said.

“W-Who’s crying?” Park Deok-Gu responded.

The dagger might have stabbed me because he spaced out, but the outcome wasn’t that bad. Of course, I couldn’t deny the fact that I almost died this time. The more I thought about it, the more absurd I found the situation because I almost died in the most pathetic way possible.

Based on my script, Park Deok-Gu was supposed to block Kim Jae-Jun before his attack reached me and before Jung Ha-Yan screamed, she had to put her mana into the healing ring.

I got to the point where I lost so much blood that I was close to fainting, so I would consider myself lucky this time.

It was the moment when I realized that even the smallest element could ruin my calculations. I also realized that I shouldn’t gamble carelessly.

‘Although gambling is necessary when needed… ’

I realized that I needed to prepare more thoroughly before gambling.

It was unfortunate, but there was nothing I could do and I even started panicking at the climax of the unexpected event just now. Of course, I expected the naive Park Deok-Gu and the fainthearted Jung Ha-Yan to react in that way.

Still, I probably should be thankful that the situation ended the way it did.

We were still in a tutorial and if I were to compare it to a game, we were still beginners.

I was sure that Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu’s issues would be resolved with time.

“Hyung-nim, I…”

“I think it would be best if we hold onto Yoo Seok-Woo,” I suggested.

“Ugh… is that okay?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

I nodded lightly.

The rare-ranked Magic Shield Ring was protecting me and after inspecting the monsters with Mind’s Eye, I determined that they didn’t have the ability to break through this magic shield.

I suddenly became thankful for Kim Hyun-Sung because the effect of the item he gave us was better than I thought.

‘Magic Shield.’

“Gyaaaaaah!”

I saw the monsters slamming themselves against the semi-transparent shield, but I wasn’t scared of them. I started reciting a spell and building my mana.

“Lord, I, wish, my voice, answer, power, to burn enemies…”

“…”

“Fireball.”

I started feeling kind of dizzy. I had enough mana to cast a spell, so it was probably because of the blood that I lost. Even though the wound had healed by now, it still felt like the damage was still there.

When I cast the spell, a large fire ball appeared in front of me, so after dismantling the shield, I extended my hand out and the fire ball created a loud noise as the monsters were caught up in the explosion.

Boom!

It was a direct hit, but Park Deok-Gu shielded me in case they were still alive. I was certain that they had been annihilated though.

“Whew…”

“I-Is your body okay?” he asked worriedly.

“I told you that I’m fine,” I answered.

I felt a bit dizzy, but it wasn’t a problem. I actually felt really refreshed because I managed to stay alive, and the situation was turning out beautifully.

Kim Hyun-Sung was going to kill Jung Jin-Ho while Kim Jae-Jun would have a great time with Jung Ha-Yan. The problem was what we were going to do with Yoo Seok-Woo because I hadn't thought about it at all. However, we had to subdue him for now.

I guess Park Deok-Gu wasn’t stupid because he started to tie Yoo Seok-Woo up. He was using a flimsy leather rope, but it was better than nothing. No, with Yoo Seok-Woo’s strength stats, he wouldn’t be able to break the leather rope on his own.

“Let go! Let go of me right now!” Yoo Seok-Woo shouted.

It must have taken him a while to realize the situation because it was only now that he started resisting, but nothing happened. He was struggling while lying on the ground and Park Deok-Gu continuously suppressed him with his strength.

“You bastard!”

“Lee Ki-Young, you rat! Let go of me right now!” he yelled again.

“Dumbass,” I commented.

“Both hyung-nims will come back for me. After they take care of that jerk Kim Hyun-Sung, they’ll come here immediately and stab your necks with a knife. You guys will definitely beg for your lives…”

Yoo Seok-Woo blabbered on and on, but I found his rant so absurd that I didn’t know what to say. His imaginary world was deeper than I imagined.

“Haha.”

“You’re laughing? You think this is funny? You think you’ll be able to keep laughing like that? Lee Ki-Young! And the pig that’s next to you… I can’t forgive that bitch Jung

Ha-Yan either. Never. I'm going to make her regret not choosing me. Every day… everyday…" he said.

"What?" I asked.

"Lee…"

"I can't hear you," I said.

Of course, I was going to display my most malicious face. When I slowly placed my hand on his ear, I pulled my face close to his and after displaying a smile, I saw him angrily foaming at the mouth.

"Lee… Lee-Lee Ki-Young, you piece of shit!"

Seeing him so agitated like this was always fun to watch.

"You must be really confident," I said.

"What…"

"It's obvious that the hyung-nims that you love had abandoned you and ran away on their own," I said.

"What?" Yoo Seok-Woo asked.

"Jung Jin-Ho didn't tell you? That he canceled the plan when Lee Ki-Chul died… no, I guess he would have suggested that it would be better to watch the situation a bit more," I replied.

"What?"

He looked surprised. The microexpression and the body language he was displaying seemed to be asking me how I knew about their plan.

This situation was what I was really looking forward to.

If not for my Mind Eye's and Kim Hyun-Sung's reaction, then we wouldn't have found out about this plan of theirs.

I would have thought nothing but. *'We're working with a slightly suspicious group.'*

I didn't care whether I was right or wrong, but after seeing his expression, I think I pretty much guessed it right, but it didn't matter anymore. It was obvious, but there was no need for us to tell him about our party's situation.

"Wh… what are you talking about?" Yoo Seok-Woo asked.

"Dumbass," I said.

I couldn't stop laughing because this was too fun. It was like these idiots were moving the chess pieces for us. It was a relief that the person that Jung Jin-Ho thought was an insurance was a dumbass like him.

"What is it that I'm saying…" I said.

"What are you talking about…" he asked.

There wasn't a need to explain it to him so instead, I displayed a bright smile. Even an idiot would know what my smile meant.

I saw Yoo Seok-Woo staring at me absent-mindedly, so it was possible that the previous happenings were flashing before him.

How our party first offered to capture the dungeon… the magic that was used when we blocked the first monster wave and Lee Ki-Chul's death, which was a bit surprising. He may be in the process of realizing the fact that me provoking him was a part of the act that was thoroughly planned out.

The idiot was probably taking a guess as to why I was touching Jung Ha-Yan so openly and there wasn't a reason for me not to have fun with Jung Ha-Yan while belittling him.

All of this was nothing more than a trap to lure him in and he probably couldn't believe the fact that he fell for it. It was true that humans weren't skilled at controlling their own emotions, but he was worse than humans in this category.

Park Deok-Gu was looking at me with a surprised look, but I didn't bother adding more to my explanation because the idiot started flopping around like a madman.

“Lee… Lee Ki-Young, you piece of shit! You’re a piece of shit!” Yoo Seok-Woo yeled.

It was amusing how he was waiting for his hyung-nims to come back. Jung Jin-Ho recruited Yoo Seok-Woo because he believed that they lacked strength. Then, they came to the dungeon with us in order to create a variable.

In conclusion, the idiot couldn’t overcome his anger and created a problem for them. It was obvious if you thought about it objectively. By now, Yoo Seok-Woo must have also realized that he made a critical mistake.

“Lee… Lee!”

“Thanks, Seok-Woo. I have a lot to thank you for,” I said.

When I sneered, I saw him charging towards me without understanding the current situation. He didn’t look scary since his hands and feet were tied, but I couldn't help but frown at the hideous sight.

“I’m going to kill you! I’m going to kill you!” he yelled.

“I can say the same thing,” I told him.

Because the decision to let him live or die lay in my hands.

“What?” Yoo Seok-Woo asked.

“I’m not a nice person. Of course, I feel uneasy about killing someone, but… after falling into a place like this, I think it’s something that I need to experience at least once. Right, experience,” I explained.

“That’s…”

“I’m the type that likes to make other people do it, but… I can’t keep letting others do the work for me forever and when it comes to sin, it’s better to share it with others,” I said.

“You… you… you’re crazy…” he said.

“You’re crazy too. If the situation got any worse, I would’ve been the one lying here. It also could’ve been Ha-Yan or Deok-Gu.”

I raised the spear that was in my hand.

“Hyung… hyung-nim!” Deok-Gu called out.

Both Park Deok-Gu and I had never killed anyone, so he sounded a bit bewildered. He didn’t seem like he was going to stop me, but it felt like he was asking whether I was really going to do it. If he dissuaded me, I would stop here because in the end, killing someone wasn’t an easy task.

It was obvious, but my hand that was holding the spear was shaking because I was afraid of killing someone. I already made up my mind and despite that, I still found it difficult to go through with it.

I was different from Jung Ha-Yan, whose personality was kind of twisted, and Kim Hyun-Sung, who definitely had killed a lot of people.

I was an ordinary person and a petty bourgeois, so I didn’t want to do this.

However…

‘A choice.’

If this was something I had to experience anyway, I thought experiencing it here was the most reasonable choice.

“S-Spare me,” Yoo Seok-Woo begged.

“Sorry,” I said.

I put my strength into my spear.

“If you don’t want to see it, close your eyes, Deok Gu,” I told him.

I didn’t bother to look at his expression. I assumed that his eyes were already closed.

“S-Spare me!”

It only took a moment for the spear to pierce through Yoo Seok-Woo’s neck as the sound of flesh being penetrated, reverberated. The feedback felt unpleasant.

"*Cough… cough…*"

I saw him struggling while holding onto the spear. I wanted to turn my head, but I knew that I shouldn't deny the fact that I was the one that pulled the trigger, and it was my bullet that I shot.

My arms and legs kept shaking. It wasn't my first time seeing someone die, but this was my first time killing someone with my own hands.

'Consider this similar to the Park Hye-Young incident.'

It was correct to say that I killed them, no, I really did kill them. When recalling the woman that I saw for the first time back at the starting point, it was also possible that I was the cause of her death because I ignored her cry for help.

There was no need for me to be flustered by it now, so all I had to do was calmly accept the situation. I had to tell myself that I had no choice and it was necessary to do what I did.

It wasn't easy watching someone quietly dying, but…

"Lord…"

"*Cough*… spa… re…"

"I'm sorry," I said.

Yoo Seok-Woo's face was filled with pain. He continued groaning and the way he kept spitting out blood wasn't a pleasant sight to see. As time passed, his face gradually relaxed as his consciousness thinned out.

"Sa… ve… mo… m…"

In the end, he looked at me and as he became quiet, the room became quiet at the same time.

"If I can do it… you can do it even better," I told Park Deok-Gu.

I told him the same thing when he and I hunted our first monster.

Unlike the first time, I didn't hear his answer. Instead, I heard a slightly odd voice. I guess this was a part of his interpersonal skills because he was trying to change the subject.

"Hyung-nim…"

"…"

"Are you a Christian?" he asked.

It was a ridiculous question that didn't go well with the current situation, but I smirked and continued the conversation.

"There's no such thing as a god."

[A new job has been opened. Please select the job that you think you'll need.]

"See, there's no way that something like that exists," I said.

There was no way.

CHAPTER 35
A NEW JOB HAS OPENED (1)

I thought that the timing of the system message was random, but after considering the fact that I have been accumulating experience so far, it wasn't that strange to me anymore.

After obtaining my first job, I killed a lot of monsters with Kim Hyun-Sung and after entering this dungeon, I continuously killed more of them. It was to the point that I thought that the system message arrived a bit late.

The funny thing was that a new job opened after I killed Yoo Seok-Woo.

'Even if I kill a person.'

It seemed that killing somebody would give me experience, and I was sure that there were more ways to gain experience. There was also a good chance that I would get experience in everything that I do.

The system was digitizing my contribution, last hits, and of course, it was difficult to obtain proper data, but I noticed that the people back at the shelter had stat changes over time. The intelligence stat could be increased through a variety of methods and by thinking and using magic, the magic stat would increase. This also applied to the other stats like stamina and agility, so I thought maybe this job was similar.

[A new job has opened. Please select the job you think you'll need.]

[Please read the jobs that have been opened.]

[Summoner - Rare Rank]

[Magic Lancer - Rare Rank]

[Black Mage - Rare Rank]

[Alchemist - Rare Rank]

[Fire Mage - Rare Rank]

'There's a lot of choices.'

I was a bit worried that there was going to be a trickster-like job. Fortunately, there weren't any of them, so I felt very relieved.

I wanted to praise the system for giving me rare-ranked jobs. I didn't look into the details, but I didn't see any bad jobs. More than that, the fact that the Leader job wasn't there made me feel really relieved.

I was sure that it wouldn't happen, but I was worried that Park Deok-Gu, who found out about my previous job, was going to turn into a parrot again and yell out *Leader* like before.

I didn't tell him back then, but he was good at appealing and because of what he said, I had to think about the job at least three times. It was to the point that I thought about what would happen if I did choose that job. I was a bit thankful for the fact that I had been completely freed from the Leader job.

Since I couldn't keep reading my status window, I had no choice but to skim through it. When I looked, there was a variety of information.

[Summoner - Rare Rank]

[A Summoner doesn't fight at the frontline. A Summoner fights by summoning a Familiar, a Spirit, or through a Mystical Beast Contract. Later, the player will be given the option to change jobs into a Tamer, a Spiritual Sorcerer, or a Mystic Beast Summoner. The player's stamina and intelligence will be increased by one point and the magic stat will be increased by two points.]

'Not bad.'

I really liked the Summoner job because I could summon a mystical beast or a spirit to fight for me. Usually, affinity was mentioned to be necessary for this kind of job in novels and games. I wasn't sure if I had that talent, but seeing as how it was listed here, the system probably thought that it went well with my nature.

[Magic Lancer - Rare Rank]

[This is a mid-ranged job that allows the player to use their magic and lance at the same time. The Magic Lancer controls the balance of the battlefield and since they're able to use their magic and spear at the same time, their job has a direct effect in small battles. The player will obtain intermediate knowledge about the lance and magic. Agility and magic stats will be increased by two points.]

[Black Mage - Rare Rank]

[This is a long-ranged job that allows the player to use black magic. Black magic is a new type of magic that will completely reverse the common knowledge of magic that the player possesses. The player may experience opposition from some religious groups because they believe that this kind of power comes from the devil, but the job's destructive power is overwhelmingly more powerful than other jobs. The player will learn basic black magic spells. Magic stats will be increased by four points.]

I decided to pass on the Magic Lancer job because I knew that I wouldn't be able to contribute as much in frontal battles. Since my strength and agility stats were low, swinging a lance wouldn't be effective. However, the Black Mage job was a different story. The fact that it would increase the magic stat by four points was tempting and it even said that it would completely reverse my common knowledge of magic.

"Hm."

However, I had to think about it thoroughly because the system message said that I might experience opposition from religious groups. After the tutorial was over, if I had to go to a fantasy world based on the Middle Ages, then a crazy religious group

may follow me to the ends of the world. I definitely didn't want that since I was in a situation where I had to be in the safest position.

[Alchemist - Rare Rank]

[The alchemist basically studies and does research about magical chemistry. They draw sigils and spells and are always looking for new ways and developments in magic. The player will learn homunculus alchemist knowledge and basic knowledge about alchemy. Later, the player can change their job into a Potion Maker, an Alchemy Mage, or a Homunculus Expert. The player's intelligence and magic stats will increase by two points.]

[Fire Mage - Rare Rank]

[Among all types of elemental mages, the Fire Mage's destructive power is second to none. The Fire Mage is a long-ranged job that supports allies through the use of strong firepower. Their spells consume a lot of mana but the unexpected firepower will surprise both enemies and allies alike. Later, the player can change into an Explosive Mage, a Magical Bomb Expert, and other related jobs. The magic stat will be increased by five points.]

Obviously, I was going to pass on the Fire Mage job. Still, it was worth thinking about since it increased the magic stat by five points, and the fact that it could release unexpected firepower caught my attention. I could probably use the job's spells twice and even though I could clearly see the disadvantage, the job didn't seem all that bad.

'Alchemist?'

Honestly, alchemist didn't sound like such a bad job. I even thought that this job was the most suitable job for me since my intelligence stat was higher than my magic stat from the get-go. Compared to the other jobs, the combat ability wasn't that great, but after seeing homunculus, alchemy magic, and the suspicious job called Potion Maker, I thought maybe it could make up for my lack of magic power.

Magic Lancer was the one that I could definitely exclude from the list. The other jobs, on the other hand, weren't bad, but they had their own pros and cons.

I thought it would be easier than picking my first job, but I was starting to feel like an idiot. The choice that I was about to make now was more important than my first choice. It was similar to picking a major.

I started getting a headache at the thought that this choice could possibly decide my position on Continent once we started to move forward from this tutorial. Choosing my next job wasn't an urgent matter, so it would be best for me to think about it later. Still, I started to get worried because out of the many jobs listed, I wasn't sure which one I should delve into.

That was when I heard a voice beside me.

"Hyung-nim?" Park Deok-Gu called out.

"Oh, sorry, Deok-Gu. We should go find Ha-Yan" I said.

"Did you get a new job or something?" he asked.

"Yeah, I didn't expect it. I guess you gain experience even when you kill a person," I told him.

"*Groan*…"

Park Deok-Gu kept his silence. He didn't seem very shocked so I felt relieved. I was worried that maybe he was having other thoughts, but luckily, it didn't seem like it. All this time, I said that he had muscles for brains, but I guess he had his own problems to deal with too, and of course, it was the same for me.

I tried to avert my gaze, but I probably wouldn't be able to forget what happened today. Park Deok-Gu seemed like he decided to accept the situation, but the strange silence must have been awkward for him because he started talking again.

"I'm not sure if that dude Kim Hyun-Sung and noonim are safe."

"I'm sure they are. I'm certain Kim Hyun-Sung is safe and I'm sure nothing happened to Ha-Yan" I said.

“How are you so sure? Is it because of that thing you call magic?” he asked.

“Something like that. The farther away they are, the more difficult it is for me to detect them, but once you obtain magic, you’ll understand what I mean,” I explained.

Of course, it wasn’t because of my magic that I was certain of their safety. Their stats and nature were the answer. One of them was a regressor and the other was a genius mage and was also a monster. It was even possible that they were already done with their tasks and were on their way here.

As expected, when we started walking for a little bit, I saw Jung Ha-Yan walking towards us. As soon as she saw me and Park Deok-Gu, she widened her eyes and ran towards us. The sight of her running in our direction was kind of cute, but after seeing the blood on her sleeve, I didn’t find it in my heart to be happy when I saw her.

“Oppa… oppa! Oppa! Oppa!” she called out.

When Jung Ha-Yan jumped into my arms, I thought about how aggressive she was from her usual self, but after thinking about how worried she was about me, I felt a bit better.

“Did you get hurt anywhere? Are you in pain? Are you okay now? *Sob*… Yoo Seok-Woo… what… what happened to that man…”

“He’s dead,” I told her.

“Ohhhh, that’s a relief,” she said.

I didn’t think that Jung Ha-Yan was going to be shocked by the news, but she immediately accepted it. I wasn’t sure if I was seeing things, but she looked a bit disappointed.

Rather than asking questions, she smiled while releasing a sigh of relief and Park Deok-Gu must have sensed that something was strange because he was examining Jung Ha-Yan closely.

“Noonim, where… did you go?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Oh… um… I unintentionally…”

For a moment, Jung Ha-Yan looked as if the cat got her tongue because she probably didn't think of an excuse on her way here.

She did scream a lot while I was lying on the ground, so I was assuming that she didn't have the luxury to think about any explanations, but I guess she had the time to tidy herself up because she wanted to look good in front of me.

After seeing her slightly flustered face, I thought that I should help her out this time too, so I spoke in her place. "You left to go help Mr. Hyun-Sung, right?"

"That's not it, oppa. I-It's not like that. I'm not interested in him at all… I just…" she said

"What?"

"It wasn't because I was worried about Mr. Hyun-Sung," she said.

She was overreacting more than I thought.

Jung Ha-Yan seemed like she didn't want me to misunderstand that she was interested in Kim Hyun-Sung, but of course that wasn't my intention when I asked.

"I was just… really angry…" she continued.

"Oh…"

"I was really mad at Kim Jae-Jun… so I did it without realizing it," she said, finishing her sentence.

The truth was Yoo Seok-Woo was the first one that stabbed me with his sword, but she didn't see it clearly because seeing Kim Jae-Jun punch and stab me in the back with a dagger had been more memorable to her.

She must have recalled that moment because she started crying again. Park Deok-Gu must have realized the fact that Jung Ha-Yan was going to release her large tears in three seconds, so he looked back at me with an awkward expression. His flustered reaction didn't fit the nickname, *the Casanova of Gangwon-do*.

'Love Doctor my ass… '

“It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay, I think I know what you want to say noonim because I immediately wanted to run after them too… hyung-nim, don’t just stand there and do…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“*Sob.* I kept… I kept thinking about what happened…”

“Noonim, everything is okay now, so please s-stop crying. It’s all over… everyone is safe and hyung-nim’s wound healed,” Park Deok-Gu told her.

“*Sob*…”

“Jeez… hyung-nim! Please comfort noonim… her eyes are swollen… what should…” he said while panicking.

I couldn’t help but laugh when I saw him quietly looking at me and begging me to comfort her. It felt like my light headache was starting to go away.

In the end, I did what he asked and when I lightly hugged her, I saw her shoulders moving up and down.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry, oppa…” she said.

I wasn’t sure what she was apologizing about, but I patted her back.

“It’s okay,” I said.

“I’m sorry, oppa. *Sob*.”

“Ahem.”

I was actually thankful because it felt like the situation ended nicely, and I started feeling better when I was feeling dirty earlier.

When I glanced over at Park Deok-Gu while comforting Jung Ha-Yan, I saw him with a funny, bright smile.

‘That pig… ’

No matter how much I thought about the situation, I still found it absurd. Of course, Jung Ha-Yan was calmer compared to before, but he was still smiling while looking at

me in a calm manner. It was obvious, but the smile that he had wasn't a warm smile that came out because he was watching me and Jung Ha-Yan. It was more of a vulgar and dirty smile.

'Was this part of his design… '

It was to the point that I was able to sort of relate to Yoo Seok-Woo, who died by my hands.

'That… '

"You two look good together, noonim," Park Deok-Gu said.

Park Deok-Gu, Gangwon-do's Love Doctor.

This was the moment when I thought about the possibility of this title being true.

CHAPTER 36
A NEW JOB HAS OPENED (2)

I saw Park Deok-Gu snickering, so I had an idea what that guy was thinking about. He was probably thinking that I was on edge and it was his intention to help me shake off the gloomy feeling by using my *dear* Jung Ha-Yan, but I wasn't exactly happy about it. It was because she was breathing heavily in my arms.

"Oppa…" she said.

Even if her crying was irrelevant to the situation, it felt like she was taking a deep breath. It was as if she was smelling my body odor because she buried her face into my chest and wasn't moving away. If Kim Hyun-Sung didn't arrive on time, she probably would have stayed like this for a few hours at least.

"You're all here," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

He came a little later than I thought.

I honestly thought Kim Hyun-Sung would finish a little bit sooner than Jung Ha-Yan, but that wasn't the case. He looked clean on the outside, but there were small burn marks on his clothes and small cuts on his cheeks, so I knew that his fight with Jung Jin-Ho wasn't easy.

Kim Hyun-Sung had monster-like stats as the regressor, but Jung Jin-Ho wasn't an easy opponent either.

'They're monsters.'

But the fight was probably one-sided though because even if Jung Jin-Ho was a skilled fighter, there was a gap between him and Kim Hyun-Sung's basic stats and experience. At most, he probably used magic in order to create a variable.

After seeing his carefree expression, I assumed that Jung Jin-Ho was no longer alive.

"The others……"

It was a sensitive question.

I quickly answered before Jung Ha-Yan said something strange. “I killed him.”

“Oh.”

It was obvious, but I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t going to criticize me by calling me a killer because it was better to get rid of the source of the threat now than to deal with it later. Even though his nature was a kind-hearted mediator, he knew better than me that we shouldn’t spare people like them.

“About Jung Jin-Ho…”

When I carefully mentioned his name, Kim Hyun-Sung simply nodded quietly.

Overall, the party seemed discouraged because Park Deok-Gu looked kind of gloomy, I was on edge and Jung Ha-Yan was crying. Of course, it was a bit different with Jung Ha- Yan, it could be said that the party’s morale was low due to the shock after our first murder.

In the end, Kim Hyun-Sung nodded and spoke. “It was something that had to be done.”

The trustworthy party leader was starting to take care of his comrades’ mental states. “I’m sure…”

“I’m sure that this was their plan from the beginning. I’m not sure how they recruited Mr. Seok-Woo, but while we are out on a hunt, it seems like he agreed to participate in their plan. If we got attacked and their plan succeeded, then the people back at the shelter would’ve been in danger,” he explained.

“…”

“I’m sure it’s difficult, but think of it as you doing the right thing,” he added.

“Hm…”

“You did the right thing and it’s possible that we may experience this kind of situation often in the future. The place that we’re in is nothing more than a tutorial, so the world outside may be harsher. I’m sure it was difficult, but I’m certain no one

will criticize you for your decisions. This doesn't apply only to the current situation, but also to the future. I'm not sure if this will make you feel better, but… please overcome it," he said.

"Thank you," I said.

"Thank you… I guess," Park Deok-Gu said.

It was a pretty great speech and he was right. Everything that he said was right.

If those guys were still alive, then not only would the shelter be in danger, but even after getting out of this tutorial, I'm sure they would kill a lot of people. Even if Yoo Seok-Woo simply became a stepping stone for my experience, I couldn't deny the things that Kim Hyun-Sung had said.

'It was nothing more than taking out the trash.'

There was no reason for me to feel guilty about it.

"Mr. Ki-Young, are you feeling better?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. If it wasn't for the ring that you gave to me… I might've died. It looks like you saved me twice now. I'm in your debt," I said.

"Your wound…"

"It's fine. It's completely healed," I answered.

After finishing his speech, Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he was feeling better. Since the situation had worked out the way he wanted, there was no reason for him to frown. I didn't know exactly what he was thinking, but for some reason, he seemed proud.

We got rid of Jung Jin-Ho's party like we planned and not only that, but we were indebted to him. I was sure that he already thought of us as comrades that he was going to stick with, but it seemed like he was thinking that we had become closer through this incident. Of course, I thought the same. We suffered together, experienced a crisis together, and overcame it together.

I was certain that the four of us would be able to maintain a good relationship even after the tutorial.

Kim Hyun-Sung was like a bus that was stable and comfortable to ride in and just imagining myself riding that bus made me feel sleepy, no, it was more like the tension was gradually disappearing.

I did think that I was safe just by being with Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan but having our regressor here definitely made things better.

“You seem a bit tired, so I think it would be best to rest somewhere nearby,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“I think that’s a good idea, dude. Both hyung-nim and… noonim look a bit tired,” Park Deok-Gu said in agreement.

“Okay.”

As for Jung Ha-Yan, I was sure that she still had some mana left.

I nodded and then spoke to Kim Hyun-Sung who started walking because I wanted to get his opinion about my job. In the end, I would still be the one responsible for my choice, but I thought that it would be best to get Kim Hyun-Sung’s opinion since he knew about the future.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung.”

“Yes, how can I help?” he asked.

“A new job opened up for me,” I replied.

“Oh.”

It was obvious, but he seemed really happy.

“That was fast,” he commented.

“Yes, it’s probably because I used my magic to kill the monsters…”

“Do you mind telling me which jobs opened up?” he asked.

“Of course.”

Both Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan seemed interested because they were looking at me. I thought it was a good topic to discuss while searching for a place to stay for the night. It was also a good way to improve the party's mood since everyone was interested in this topic.

"There's a lot of choices for me, but they are summoner, magic lancer, black mage, alchemist, and fire mage," I said.

"Yes, there's definitely a lot," Kim Hyun-Sung said in agreement.

Since there wasn't a decent place nearby, we first discussed the disadvantages of the jobs and the jobs I could choose later on. We discussed things like how a black mage required a lot of mana and that a magic lancer didn't have any other jobs it could branch out to. Even though I had never revealed my exact stats, I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung somewhat had an idea about my stats.

"I'm sorry, but… your mana is a bit…"

"Yes, I don't exactly know the details since I haven't met another mage before, but my mana stat is pretty low and even after comparing myself to Ha-Yan, I don't think it's very high," I explained.

"Hm…"

Revealing some of my personal details were required to receive detailed advice. In addition, there was no need to hide the things that I was lacking because I still had many strong points that I could show to him.

"I think it would be best to think about the fire mage a bit more. I think your compatibility with fire magic isn't all that bad, but since it demands a large amount of mana, it could become a problem later on," Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

"Oh, I agree with you," I said.

Seeing him trying his best to give me hints was cute. I didn't know his real age but based on his outer appearance, he looked younger than me.

"The magic lancer is…"

He couldn't outright say it, but it seemed like this was what he wanted to say.

'You're not a skilled lancer.'

I thought I did more than enough for my part, but I guessed in his eyes, I looked clumsy. I wasn't planning on choosing this job anyways, but after seeing his expression, I couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed.

I couldn't help but think to myself. *'Was I that bad… '*

"Personally, I think choosing from summoner, alchemist, and black mage is the best, but it's difficult for me to recommend black mage. I can't say it with certainty, but you could end up being in a dangerous situation because the status window never lies to us," he explained.

"Hm…"

"You need mana in order to maintain your summons, but I have no idea how much mana is required to do that. I think the alchemist job isn't all that bad. It should be a good fit for you since your intelligence stat is high, Mr. Ki-Young," he said.

"I was actually thinking the same thing because it seems like spells are activated through a catalyst…"

"Not only that, but you'll be able to create potions and all kinds of medicine. If we need summons later on, then there are alternative ways to summon a homunculus. This will make the job even more advantageous for you. After all, the creature will be created instead of summoned. As a result, mana consumption shouldn't be that high," he said.

It seemed like Kim Hyun-Sung's excitement was causing him to get carried away.

Unlike the first time when he lacked information about me, he somewhat had an idea about my stats now, so I thought I would trust his recommendations. Not only that but seeing his slightly happy expression caused me to open myself up a bit.

'It's rare.'

People that had the alchemist job were rare. It was possible that the job itself was rarely offered to people, or it could be because not a lot of people had chosen to become an alchemist. But anyway, the alchemist job was very rare.

If we also assumed that the priest job was rare, then the value of potions should be high. But after I considered how a priest's holy power had its limits, I realized that high-quality potions would become a required item in anyone's arsenal sooner or later.

The summoner job was also tempting, but if two people in the same party had similar jobs then it was possible that our summons would differ later on.

While I was thinking about different things…

Park Deok-Gu, who was listening to our conversation, shook his head and participated in the conversation. "What are you talking about? Hyung-nim should definitely go for the black mage," Park Deok-Gu said.

"…"

"After thinking about how a black mage destroys monsters by spreading the power of darkness, I think this job fits hyung-nim the most… no matter how you look at it, hyung-nim is definitely a black mage, right?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

I had no idea why, but I felt tired listening to his words. I guess he forgot about how he reacted when the leader job opened up last time. Now, he was set on making me choose the black mage job.

"I mean, who cares what the public thinks. If anyone comes after you hyung-nim, I'll send all of them flying, so you don't have to worry about that… your personality and the black mage don't exactly go well together, but hyung-nim, imagine yourself in a black robe… I think you'll look great…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"I think the alchemist job is better," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

I think Kim Hyun-Sung was starting to feel agitated because he noticed the strange conviction in Park Deok-Gu's voice whenever he shouted.

"No! Hyung-nim needs to choose the black mage no matter what!"

Back then, Park Deok-Gu had once turned into a parrot that repeatedly shouted the leader job. But now, he changed into a parrot that was now repeatedly shouting black mage.

“The alchemist job is way better,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Black mage!” Park Deok-Gu shouted.

“The alchemist is…”

“Black mage! I want to see hyung-nim spread the power of darkness,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Alchemist!”

“Black mage!”

“Alchemy!”

“Black!”

“Al!”

‘I shouldn’t have asked.’

I imagined that this might happen again, but seeing them react more intensely than before made me feel embarrassed. I guess Park Deok-Gu was really set on the power of darkness.

When I glanced over at Jung Ha-Yan, she must have thought that I was asking for her opinion because she shook her head violently.

“I-I can’t choose between an intelligent oppa that knows alchemy and an o-oppa that uses the power of darkness…” she said.

Of course, I wasn’t asking about her opinion. While I was distracted, the strange debate was starting to get heated.

In the end, Kim Hyun-Sung quietly looked through his bag and spoke.

“Coincidentally… I coincidentally… obtained this item. It looks like an alchemist exclusive item. If you choose to become an alchemist, I’ll give you this as a present,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

'Where in the world did he get that?'

The leather bag that Kim Hyun-Sung carried around with him must be a magic bag or something.

I never imagined that he would make such an impulsive decision.

Thanks to him, I became certain that people's perception of black mages wasn't great, but apart from that, the moment I saw the item that he took out, I had no choice but to abandon the opinion of the party's black mage parrot.

CHAPTER 37
WE SURVIVED

[Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy - Epic Rank - Alchemist Only]

The great alchemist, Ramus Tucker was a leading alchemist that had once dominated an era. He was affiliated with the republic's military. He was once heralded as the number one alchemist in biocompatibility and potion compatibility. It is widely known that for some reason, he was executed one day. After his death, the alchemy knowledge he left behind has become ubiquitous to this day. Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy is one of the most completed books about alchemy because it contains the research he left behind including a variety of alchemy knowledge not listed in basic alchemy knowledge. This is a basic job with an unknown epic-ranked alchemy knowledge as a reward. Magic and intelligence stats will be increased by one point.]

'Epic rank?'

After seeing the item in front of me, ignoring the opinion of the black mage parrot wasn't unreasonable at all.

Honestly, the job wouldn't increase my stats that much because it only increased my magic and intelligence stats by one point, but considering that the item was epic-ranked, it probably contained a lot more knowledge than I could imagine.

As Kim Hyun-Sung stated earlier, the status window would never lie and if that book was labeled as an epic-ranked item, then I was sure that it contained knowledge that was equal to its rank.

"What do you think?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"…"

I was a bit surprised by how that item suddenly appeared and when I looked at him,

I think he noticed that he made a mistake. He was only human though, so it was natural for him to make mistakes, but it seemed like he fell for Park Deok-Gu's unintentional provocation.

Of course, I couldn't deny the fact that there was a strange conviction in his voice when he shouted his heart out, but Kim Hyun-Sung seemed a bit adorable today.

"How did you manage to get this?" I asked.

"This book was inside the chest that I found last time. I thought I wouldn't be able to find any use for it, but now, the timing is just perfect…" he replied.

"I still think that you look better as a black mage…" Park Deok-Gu commented.

"It's an epic-ranked item. I can't read this book since I'm not an alchemist, but I'm sure that it'll exceed your expectations. If you consider the fact that it's ranked right under legendary… I'm sure that becoming an alchemist should be the right way. On top of that, I don't like having an item that has no use," he said.

"Still… the black mage… hyung-nim…" Park Deok-Gu mumbled.

Even in this situation, he kept mumbling black mage.

Kim Hyun-Sung's excuse was ridiculous.

There was a good chance that the rings he gave us and the bracelet he gifted Park Deok-Gu weren't items that you could find in a place like this. Saying that a treasure chest suddenly popped up was a bit far-fetched. Even if he told me that he coincidentally got it after yielding it to others 100 times, it wasn't convincing enough for me to say that this book truly existed in a place like this.

'So he is finally being bold?'

But after seeing Kim Hyun-Sung's face, I guess he decided to pretend not to acknowledge the absurdity of his excuse.

I wasn't sure if his entire inventory was filled with rare items or if he was using some sort of shop that wasn't open to us just yet, but I assumed that the leather bag he was carrying with him contained items beyond my imagination. If his inventory was filled with rare items, then I could understand his mistake, but if it was the latter, then it

meant that he fell for Park Deok-Gu's provocation and purchased that item from that *secret* shop outright. Nevertheless, it was definitely an uncommon item.

I thought that thinking more about this was useless, so I immediately nodded. "I was tempted by the black mage job, but I think alchemist is the better choice for me."

Kim Hyun-Sung's face brightened up. "You made a good choice," he said.

"Thank you."

[You have changed your job to Alchemist. You have acquired basic alchemy knowledge.]

[Checking Player Lee Ki-Young's status window and stats.]

[Name - Lee Ki-Young]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 25]

[Nature - Cautious strategist]

[Job - Alchemist]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 11/ Below average growth limit]

[Agility - 11 / Below average growth limit]

[Stamina - 15/below average growth limit]

[Intelligence - 29/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 12/Below average growth limit]

[Luck - 25/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 08/Below average growth limit]

[Gear]

[Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy - Epic Rank - Exclusive to Alchemists]

[Magic Shield Ring - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Mind's Eye]

[Overall Review - You chose a good path. I don't have much to say, but seeing you do your best is breaking my heart. Yes. Really. I also see an item you're not worthy of having. I really hope you have the knowledge to understand Ramus Tucker's alchemy. I'll feel bad for the epic-ranked item because it'll be nothing more than casting pearls before swine.]

When my body shone in blue light for a moment, I knew right then that my job had changed.

In an instant, basic knowledge about alchemy started pouring into my head.

'Not bad.'

It was difficult, but it wasn't to the point that I couldn't understand it.

When I displayed a satisfied expression, I noticed that Kim Hyun-Sung's expression was slowly changing as he looked at me. I guess his evaluation of me had increased. I was sure that I went from being a useful administrator to an alchemist that had to be trained well.

'It's good news.'

It meant that my value had increased.

“Congratulations, Mr. Ki-Young,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Ugh… it’s unfortunate, but if that’s your choice hyung-nim…” Park Deok-Gu said in disappointment.

“Congratulations, oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Thank you and I want to thank Deok-Gu and Ha-Yan as well. I’ll put your gift to good use, Mr. Hyung-Sung. I have only been receiving things from you,” I said.

I was especially thankful towards Park Deok-Gu.

“It’s fine. If you get stronger, then it means that our entire party got stronger, so it’s only natural for me to give it to you. I’m actually really happy that I was able to help you,” he said.

“I’ll live up to your expectations,” I told him.

It was obvious, but since this is what I chose, I had to live up to his expectations no matter what. Since Kim Hyun-Sung was helping me grow, I needed to show results so that he would continue to invest in me. Simply put, I was a stock now.

Kim Hyun-Sung invested in a stock called Lee Ki-Young, so I was sure that he was expecting the upper limit price to jump. Even if I hit rock bottom, I don’t think he would abandon me, but it was obvious that his investment amount will decrease a lot. In order to make him continue to invest in me, I needed to continuously show him my growth.

“There’s no need to do that, haha. Let’s rest here for today. Seeing as how we haven’t found a decent place after walking this far, I think the underground doesn’t have a place we can camp,” Kim Hyun-Sung suggested.

“Okay, let’s do that. Deok-Gu,” I called out.

“Then, I’ll go and clean up the area nearby,” he said.

I nodded.

It was no different from being homeless, but cleaning the immediate vicinity where we were going to stay at temporarily was the right thing to do.

There wasn't much and as usual, it only took a moment for us to make our beds.

I lightly nodded at the thought that this tutorial was coming to an end soon.

Even though we haven't completed the survival quest yet, Kim Hyun-Sung didn't seem nervous about it, so I guess it was okay to think that we were at the last stage of taking control of this dungeon.

Whether we had to find the entrance or get rid of the owner of this dungeon, I was sure that this party will get through it without any issues.

When I glanced over, I saw the party members. I couldn't help but smile when I saw Jung Ha-Yan dozing off and Park Deok-Gu already snoring. Despite knowing that I needed to sleep in order to be prepared for tomorrow, I didn't sleep, no, to be exact I couldn't sleep.

'Alchemy.'

It was because I had to somewhat organize my newly acquired knowledge.

There weren't any skills that I could use right now because in order to perform alchemy, I needed a lot of equipment. This place also didn't have a catalyst that allowed me to use alchemy magic. However, studying ahead was the right thing to do since organizing the basic alchemy knowledge would take some time. Because of this, I decided not to open Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy yet.

"You weren't sleeping?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"I couldn't sleep," I replied.

I needed to level myself up in order to survive. Not only did I have to train myself, but it was fair to say that the idea that one should never settle in one place gave me this passion.

Potion compatibility, basic knowledge about homunculus, alchemy catalyst, and correlation with magic were all difficult topics.

I noticed Kim Hyun-Sung staring at me, but I didn't care because I actually wanted him to stare at me longer.

'I'm working hard, Mr. Investor.'

Showing this side of me was beneficial because when I saw Kim Hyun-Sung nod with satisfaction, I became even more satisfied.

When I noticed that a little bit of time had passed, it was already morning and even though I didn't sleep at all, I didn't regret it.

The party members slowly started getting up and while having different conversations, we started to walk. The others looked more relaxed than gloomy.

While walking, Kim Hyun-Sung would make jokes here and there and Park Deok-Gu would laugh at them as if he was trying to drown out the dungeon with laughter. Kim Hyun-Sung looked a bit relaxed, and I was sure that the others felt the same thing as him.

'I guess there's no boss in this dungeon.'

Probably not.

We were wary of our surroundings, but we weren't wearing our battle-ready faces.

Kim Hyun-Sung seemed a bit carefree, but he was also worried about the things that could happen in the future, but if I were to explain exactly what he was thinking, he was probably thinking that this was only the beginning.

'This is only the beginning.'

It wasn't over.

We got lost easily at first, but with Kim Hyun-Sung leading the party, we continued to try and escape this hell together. We would fight from time to time, but the fights never escalated to the point that we felt nervous.

After walking for a while, we found an entrance that was a bit different from this place.

"You know, a monster may jump out from there," Park Deok-Gu said.

"We'll enter after we prepare for battle," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Dude, I’ll take the lead,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I leave it up to you,” Kim Hyun-Sung told him.

When the large door opened, I heard a familiar voice.

[Activating Rare Rank required quest.]

[Rare Rank Quest - Control (0/1)]

When we looked around as soon as the door opened, we didn’t see any monsters. The location looked like some kind of temple. There was a strange magic circle in the center and on the other side, there was another door. Park Deok-Gu quickly ran towards it and tried to push it open, but the door wouldn’t budge.

“I guess the door won’t open,” he said.

“I’m sure there’s a condition to open it. I’m sure escaping this place is what they mean by control,” I said.

Then I noticed that the situation had changed a bit.

Unlike me, Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan who were a bit hesitant, Kim Hyun-Sung slowly raised his hand as if he was really used to it. When he slowly channeled his mana into the magic circle that was in the center, the circle lit up. Seeing everyone stare at it absent-mindedly was kind of funny.

“It was… magic.”

There wasn’t some great quiz that was needed for control. Magic itself was the medium that existed far from where we lived and that was the answer to the quiz.

[You have completed the rare rank required quest.]

[Rare Rank Quest - Control (1/1)]

[Rare Rank Quest - Survival (1/1)]

“Hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu called out.

“I know,” I said.

Seeing Kim Hyun-Sung clench his fist made him look as if he achieved something. He wasn’t the type to show his emotions, but he looked like he was in a really good mood. He looked like he was crying, but that wasn’t the case. I was sure that I was right because unlike his shoulders that were shaking intermittently, his face looked as if he felt an enormous amount of accomplishment.

“It’s pretty,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“You’re right,” I said.

Considering the ending that happened at a lousy place, I saw something beautiful.

The lights that emanated from the ground shot up to the high ceiling and the lights that were on the ceiling filled this entire place. Seeing the door on the other side slowly opening, I knew that we were finally about to escape from this damn place.

The sunlight that was shining down from within the door was totally different from the artificial light in this place.

‘Sunlight.’

What I saw wasn’t a landscape, but people who were holding armors and weapons. A woman that looked like the leader of the group quietly approached us.

“Congratulations on your safe return from the tutorial. My name is Lee Sang-Hee and I’m the person in charge of this tutorial dungeon.”

We survived and we finally came to our senses at this moment.

CHAPTER 38
NEW ENVIRONMENT (1)

“Congratulations on your safe return from the tutorial. My name is Lee Sang-Hee and I’m the person in charge of this tutorial dungeon,” she said.

She looked very polite.

Not only did she quietly bow, but seeing the small smile on her face made me realize that Lee Sang-Hee and the people behind her didn’t have any hostile feelings towards us. On the contrary, they were actually friendly.

“What do you mean by the person in charge of this tutorial dungeon?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“It’s like I said. I’m the sub guild master of the Blue Guild, a free guild within the Benigoa Empire and I am in charge of the tutorial dungeon for this round,” she explained.

“Does that mean you guys are the ones that summoned us to this place?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“No. We’re in the same position as all of you guys. We were suddenly summoned into the tutorial dungeon one day and experienced the same test as well. The only difference is that we arrived before you. I don’t know how this happened or why the summoning ceremony started,” she answered.

“Hm…”

“Our job is to take care of you after you’ve finished taking control of the tutorial dungeon and saving the survivors that are still inside. Not only will we help you adapt and teach you about living in a new environment, but we guarantee that you’ll have basic living rights,” Lee Sang-Hee explained.

“Basic living rights?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“Yes, basic living rights,” she replied.

“I see. Does that mean all of you were able to enter this place after controlling the dungeon?” he asked.

“That’s right. The door of the tutorial dungeon will remain open for about three days after completion. After three days, the door of the dungeon will close again. We haven’t figured out why that happens, but… anyways, please follow us. We can talk about the details once we’re inside,” she suggested.

I felt a bit dumbfounded because I never imagined that we would be able to relax like this after leaving the dungeon. More than that, the woman’s attitude was strange.

[Checking Player Lee Sang-Hee’s status window and stats.]

[Name - Lee Sang-Hee]

[Title - Iron Blood]

[Age - 33]

[Nature - Ideal Mediator]

[Job - Holy Knight]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic shield knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic holy knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate holy knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 82/Above epic growth limit]

[Agility - 52/Above rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 90/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 30/Below average growth limit]

[Endurance - 91/Above epic growth limit]

[Luck - 33/Below rare growth limit]

[Magic - 77/Above rare growth limit]

[Gear]

[Saint Caliber - Epic Rank]

[Iron Blood Shield - Epic Rank - Exclusive to knights]

[Belt of Strength - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - Iron Blood]

[Overall Review - Player Lee Sang-Hee's stats are amazing. She experienced quite a bit of growth and is now settling down. Her endurance and strength stats still have a bit of room to grow, but it may be difficult for her to grow her other stats. In the end, her stats aren't bad, but it's a bit unfortunate. However, please don't underestimate her because a comparison between you two is impossible.]

'Underestimate?'

Of course, I wasn't going to underestimate her.

'A monster.'

Even if all of us attacked her at once, we wouldn't stand a chance. It was the same for the people around us.

If I were to judge her based on stats alone, there was too big of a difference between us to even make a comparison.

If she wanted to, she could easily kill us on the spot, but despite that…

'She's kind.'

She was very kind, no, it felt like she was trying to be humble.

"Miss Hwa-Yeon?" she called out.

"Yes," a woman answered.

"Please begin searching for survivors that are inside. I'll be spending some time with this group," Lee Sang-Hee said.

"Got it."

After seeing the soldiers enter the dungeon, I thought that it was only a matter of time until Lee Ji-Hye and the others were rescued.

Not only did I see Koreans, but I saw foreigners too. Based on the style and the appearance of their clothes, I didn't think that they were from the modern world, so I assumed they were locals here.

As I looked around the place while walking, I saw Lee Sang-Hee, who was in the front, starting to talk and the person that answered was Kim Hyun-Sung, the leader of our party. Rather than participating in the conversation, I thought that it would be better to listen and gather information, so I quietly listened to them.

"I think you completed the quest pretty fast," she said.

"Wasn't it like this for the others?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"No. On average, it takes about six months for a group to complete it, so it's very rare

for a group to complete it in three months. I'm sure the dungeon here was completed a lot faster than the other dungeons," she explained.

"Are there dungeons in other places too?" he asked.

"Yes. The republic and the allied kingdom are managing several tutorial dungeons. The Benigoa Holy Empire, the empire we're affiliated with, is managing a total of three dungeons. Not only are there Koreans here but people with different nationalities are usually summoned to a specific location and will undergo the same tutorial," she replied.

"I see. Then does that mean we were the fastest in completing the dungeon quest?" he asked.

"Based on my explanation, yes. It's forbidden to ask exactly what happened inside, but I'm really curious as to how you managed to complete the quest so fast. Not only that… but you managed to do it with a small group that only has four people," she said.

"A lot of things happened and it would be difficult for me to tell you everything, but… we didn't really face a lot of hardships. Not only that, but Mr. Deok-Gu, Mr. Ki-Young, and Miss Ha-Yan all did their parts, so we were able to control the dungeon. Oh, there's also a shelter on the first floor, so please rescue the people that are there, " Kim Hyun-Sung requested.

"Excuse me?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

"This dude made a shelter so that he can gather all the survivors. We left the people that couldn't hunt and created a separate dungeon party. We created something similar to a fortress wall at a safe location and used it as a base for our operations, so I'm sure they're all safe. They also have more than enough supplies. Yup, that's it!" Park Deok-Gu explained.

"I see…"

Lee Sang-Hee looked kind of stupefied.

'Ohhh.'

I started to understand something. I understood exactly the things that were

happening around us.

“I… I see,” she said.

It seemed like Lee Sang-Hee was having a difficult time hiding her emotions.

‘Kim Hyun-Sung, you sly fox.’

I never expected that our party’s ace and main character would do something as annoying as hiding his power.

When I looked back at the tutorial dungeon, I noticed people that had been rescued appearing one by one, but they weren’t people back at the shelter, so I assumed that these people had been hiding all by themselves. Of course, it was a mess. Some people were crying and others asked questions about where they were as if they were nitpicking. This was probably how people would usually react in a situation like this. Not only that but there were armed people in the area. In addition, the way they treated the others was strangely different from us. They looked oppressive and were looking down on the others.

“What is this place? W-What… in the world…” A survivor said.

“Mom… mom… waaah…” Another survivor was crying.

“Please gather. We’ll provide you with enough details later on. We first need to go outside together. Hey! You! Keep it down!”

“What! Is this place! Where am I?!” Another person yelled.

“Hey! Drag that bastard out of here this instant!”

“Let me go!” A survivor said while struggling.

“Waaaah… where am I?” Another person asked while crying.

“I told you that I’ll explain everything later. Please follow the regulations. You must follow the regulations first! All of you are safe. There isn’t any more danger. Everyone, please follow the regulations.”

‘This is nice.’

The way they were being treated was totally different from us.

I was sure that crying and asking others to save them and panicking was the usual reaction of people that had been in such a cruel environment, but our party was a bit different.

Not only was Kim Hyun-Sung extremely calm, but Jung Ha-Yan didn't show any reaction to the new environment. She simply remained right next to me.

It was the same for Park Deok-Gu. He even kept on asking questions because he was curious about a lot of things.

From Lee Sang-Hee's point of view, I was sure that she was a bit puzzled because this party cleared the tutorial dungeon that was located all over the world in record time and with only four people.

Not only that, but we were noticeably calm and had even created a shelter for other survivors.

I could understand why she was a bit confused.

'They're being treated differently… '

I could understand why these people were being treated differently from us. After all, these people did nothing but hide and run instead of fighting. Participating in a control party from the start meant that the party members had the ability to properly integrate into this new environment.

Seeing as how Lee Sang-Hee kept talking about a guild, an empire, and the republic, I was certain there was an interest group.

I wasn't sure if this was a good example, but we were like rookie sports players whose worth had increased tremendously and they were like teams that were trying to recruit us. Assuming that there weren't that many good players like us here, and there were a lot of people on the team, then there was one thing I could predict.

'We're the client and they're the supplier.'

We were definitely the client.

I understood why Kim Hyun-Sung didn't hesitate to hide his power. Seeing as how he was discreetly explaining our performance like a sly fox, it became obvious to me that he was trying to increase our worth. If we were eventually going to be sold off, it would be better for us to be sold at the highest price possible.

Of course, I didn't know what Kim Hyun-Sung's immediate plan was, but no matter which side he picked, we would be walking on a bed of roses and the thought of it made me smile.

'Being in the same party as the regressor sure is great.'

"Let's go inside," Lee Sang-Hee said.

As expected, the place she guided us to was a pretty luxurious-looking room. It was so impressive that it was difficult to believe that this place was located near the tutorial dungeon.

"For your drinks… oh, if you'd like, we can serve you food," she said.

"Do you have food that we can eat?" Park Deok-Gu asked.

"Yes. It may be different from the food that you are used to eating on Earth, but I'm sure it's way better than the food that you have been eating inside the dungeon," she replied.

"That would be great."

The blue flag and the accessories that were inside the room made it seem like they were trying their best to show off the status of the Blue Guild. It seemed like they put in a lot of work just for today.

I wasn't sure if they were trying to immediately recruit us or if there were more procedures we had to go through, but they were trying hard to leave a good impression on us.

"Oh, now that I think about it, I haven't heard your names yet. If you don't mind, could you tell me your names?" Lee Sang-Hee asked.

"I'm Kim Hyun-Sung. A swordsman."

The fact that he told her his job was quite surprising and after him, Park Deok-Gu spoke. “My name is Park Deok-Gu and I’m a shieldbearer.”

“I’m J-Jung Ha-Yan. I’m a mage…”

Naturally, her eyes landed on me.

For a moment, I contemplated whether hiding my job would be a good idea, but I thought that there wasn’t a need to do that. I nodded after thinking that it would be a good idea to copy the others in order to increase my worth.

“I’m Lee Ki-Young and I’m an alchemist.”

Unlike the other three, I changed my job twice. I nodded with satisfaction after thinking that Lee Sang-Hee’s evaluation of me was about to increase, but what I saw was a look of disappointment instead.

‘Huh?’

I was sure that I wasn’t seeing things and even though it only lasted for a moment, she looked very disappointed.

“Oh, t-that’s amazing. You already changed jobs twice…” Lee Sang-Hee said.

She said it was amazing, but her voice sounded as if her heart was breaking a little bit.

Naturally, I couldn’t help but look at Kim Hyun-Sung.

‘You said that alchemist is a good job, you jerk… ’

CHAPTER 39
NEW ENVIRONMENT (2)

I resented Kim Hyun-Sung for a moment and even though I felt a bit like I had been stabbed in the back, I thought about how there wasn't a reason for him to trick me. I was sure that there was a reason why he recommended the alchemist job to me. Otherwise, there was no way he would give me an epic-ranked item as a gift.

To him, it may not have been a big investment, but the Lee Sang-Hee that was in front of us only had two epic-ranked items. I had no idea how long had she been here, but not only had she changed her jobs a few times, but she had already reached her growth limit. From her perspective, an epic-ranked item would be…

'Worth it.'

I was worried that maybe Kim Hyun-Sung just needed someone to make potions, but… seeing the way he acted, I didn't think that this was the case.

'I need to trust him.'

There was a good chance that this job wasn't valuable just yet, but later on, I was sure that the time would come when an alchemist would be considered valuable in some way.

I plan to trust and follow our regressor for now since I knew that he wasn't stupid and I was sure that he had a good plan.

'As long as I don't have to constantly make potions.'

It was fine as long as this wouldn't happen. While I had a lot of different thoughts, the food arrived and we started eating with a bit of an awkward atmosphere around us. It was definitely a friendly atmosphere, but it felt like Kim Hyun-Sung and Lee Sang-Hee both wanted something from each other.

Park Deok-Gu shoved his face into his plate and was eating as though he hadn't seen food in a long time. Meanwhile, both Kim Hyun-Sung and Lee Sang-Hee looked like

they had a lot on their minds.

They cleverly changed the subject by talking about different topics, but the innocent Park Deok-Gu was the one that hit the nail.

“Wow, this is delicious. I don’t know how long it has been since I ate a warm meal.”

“I’m glad that you’re enjoying the food,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“My grandma told me not to trust anyone that offers free food… I guess the affection of Koreans still exists! Don’t you think so, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

Lee Sang-Hee looked as if she got caught and to prevent losing this chance, Kim Hyun-Sung quickly continued the conversation.

“Um…”

“He’s right, now that I think about it. It’s just as Mr. Deok-Gu said. I appreciate you treating us well, but I’m curious as to why you’re treating us this way. Of course, we’re not uncomfortable by it. However… this feels a bit extravagant for it to be a celebratory event for us returning alive. If this is truly out of kindness, then I apologize,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Oh no, it’s fine. I’m the one that… should apologize. You’re right and I’m sure everything is confusing for you all. All of you seemed a bit calm, so I don’t think I was able to understand how you felt. I understand that it’s difficult to trust people, especially after what you went through in there. I know, because I went through the same. I apologize for not explaining in detail earlier,” she said.

“No, it’s okay. I didn’t say it with that kind of intention,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I guess it’ll be best to start out by explaining the background of this place,” she said.

“Yes, that would be great.”

“This place is a bit different from Earth, but there are some similarities. The Union of Kingdoms, the Republics, and the Holy Empire, which is the nation we’re affiliated with, are the three large countries that are maintaining the balance of this place. Of course, there are free countries and other kingdoms that I haven’t listed, but… the three countries that I mentioned earlier are the largest ones,” Lee Sang-Hee

explained.

“Oh.”

“Of course, we’re not the ones that created this country and I’m sure you noticed that on your way here. Besides us, there are locals that have been living here and the relationship between the earthlings and the locals are entangled with complex interests,” she said.

“I see…”

“Strictly speaking, our Blue Guild is affiliated with the Benigoa Empire, but at the same time, we’re not. We may be free from their laws, but we’ve been living on their land and have been receiving their cooperation and support, but it’s not just us. All the groups that have settled down here are moving based on their contract with the Benigoa Holy Empire.”

I somewhat understood what she said and in a way, I thought we were fortunate.

Each group had freed themselves from the empire’s influence and possessed somewhat of an autonomous right and I was sure they had to offer things in exchange for their freedom. Like being drafted if a war broke out… taxes, or something just as complicated.

Seeing as how the country wasn’t in chaos, I guess the three countries possessed something to prevent the guilds from stepping all over them. I was sure that they were keeping the guilds with autonomous rights under control with armed forces or with resources.

“I see,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“The tutorial dungeon opens up once every year. The Holy Empire has entrusted us, the foreigners, to manage the tutorial dungeon,” Lee Sang-Hee explained.

“And you’re referring to the Blue Guild, right?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

“No, when it comes to managing, there’s a rotation for it. All the large and mid-sized guilds gather and decide on the order. That’s what I meant when I said that we were in charge this time. Not only is the Blue Guild managing the tutorial dungeon this time, but we have the right to negotiate with you first,” she said.

“That’s fair,” Kim Hyun-Sung commented.

I was sure that the Holy Empire was the one that created that fairness because, for some reason, I just couldn’t imagine the earthlings gathering together to create some kind of order so that everyone would receive a fair share. I was sure that the empire was wary of the earthlings coming together, so they were trying to maintain a balance amongst the guilds.

It seemed like there were other solutions other than this, but there wasn’t a reason for me to know.

“In that case, are you saying that we’re affiliated with the Blue Guild?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“No, as I mentioned earlier, we have the right to negotiate with you first. If I were to describe it based on the situation on Earth, it would be easier for you to understand it as us being the company and all of you are people that are waiting to negotiate your employment and salary,” Lee Sang-Hee explained.

“I understand,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

It was just like what I expected.

“You can think of this large room and food as us bribing you, yes, that sounds about right,” she said.

For some reason, she displayed a bitter smile. Everything was moving according to assumptions, but I found Lee Sang-Hee’s reaction unexpected.

‘She’s extremely honest.’

Honestly, if I were in her spot, I would have mixed more than half of her explanation with lies, but there wasn’t a need to mix in lies if the explanation was long.

Rather than explaining her point of view, she only told facts about the reality that surrounded the Continent.

I expected it after seeing her nature, but this woman was too upright. I was certain that her honesty and upright attitude were the traits that brought her to this position.

It seemed like this was the kind of image that the Blue Guild wanted to show us.

'They're desperate.'

They were currently desperate, so I immediately started talking. It was a question regarding the Blue Guild.

"I have a question."

"Go ahead."

"What's the Blue Guild's position within the Benigoa Empire?" I asked.

It felt like she was being hesitant, but in the end, she nodded and answered. "The Blue Guild used to be one of the guilds that represented the Holy Empire. I can't say that the guild is big, but…"

"You spoke in past tense," I pointed out.

"Yes… all I can say is that we experienced an unavoidable situation, but I hope you'll consider the guild's future potential. Not only do we have the same growth potential as the other large guilds, but I'm sure that we can offer just as much as the other guilds when it comes to the amount and any conditions that you have," Lee Sang-Hee explained.

I didn't know what it was about us that she wanted to recruit us. To be frank, if she recruited us after agreeing to give us a large sum of money, but we didn't provide the result that she was expecting from us, it would be akin to paying gold for shit.

Considering how we cleared the dungeon at record time and the four of us brought incredible results, it may not be a bad idea to invest in us, but she seemed to be in a hurry to even think of that.

'She's really desperate.'

I had no idea what happened, but I was sure that the Blue Guild was currently in a desperate situation. Otherwise, there would be no reason for them to gamble like this.

"It's a bit difficult for us to give you our answer right now, but after hearing your

story, I don't think it's all that bad," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Oh, thank you."

Kim Hyun-Sung reacted in a more positive way than I thought and it was as if he didn't mind hearing her out. I had a feeling that he hadn't decided on our next destination just yet.

'Is this a potential place?'

There was a possibility and even though they were at the top at one point, the guild was currently falling, so we could potentially take advantage of them.

Anyways, when we took a positive stance, Lee Sang-Hee's face brightened up.

"Then, you can rest for today… and… is tomorrow okay?" she asked carefully.

"Yes, let's do that," Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

Lee Sang-Hee nodded and started guiding us to our rooms. Unlike the sticky and uncomfortable ground from the tutorial dungeon, the room had a fancy-looking bed that made me want to cheer.

This was how business should be done.

There was a possibility that they may not treat us as nicely once we signed the contract, but we could live life like a king before that happened.

"If you're uncomfortable with anything, please let me know. I'll take my leave…" she said.

"Yes, thank you for taking care of us," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

After she left, the members turned their attention towards me and it felt like they were waiting for me to share my opinion regarding this situation. In the end, Kim Hyun-Sung was the one that made the decision, but I spoke because Park Deok-Gu kept staring at me.

"It's a bit sudden, but… I never imagined that we will be treated this way. I'm not used to this kind of VIP treatment," I said.

“Me too, hyung-nim. Ugh… the conversation about contracts and empires gave me a headache. Did you understand it noonim?” Park Deok-Gu asked Jung Ha-Yan.

“Yes… sort of…” she said.

“It’s not as complicated as you think, Mr. Deok-Gu, Miss Ha-Yan. Right now, we’re in a position where we will receive extravagant treatment, and I’m sure that the Blue Guild isn’t the only place that’ll treat us this way. After we finish our first negotiation, we may receive different offers from different guilds,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“I hate things that give me a headache…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“We don’t have to think that hard about which place will be beneficial for us. This place may be better for us than joining a larger guild. The condition may not be as good, but since this place needs us immediately, I’m sure a certain standard of treatment will be guaranteed,” he explained.

“Then are you suggesting that we join a guild that needs our help?” I asked.

“Yes, it’s just my feeling, but Miss Lee Sang-Hee… she doesn’t seem like a bad person and the Blue Guild doesn’t seem bad either. I don’t know what caused the guild to fall, but since they’re focused on rebuilding the guild, I’m sure their offer for us won’t be disappointing,” he explained.

I nodded after hearing his answer.

I guess Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu weren’t interested in this kind of conversation because when I looked at them, they looked like they were spacing out. I think me and Kim Hyun-Sung were the only ones that had a brain here.

What was a bit surprising was that he seemed like he didn’t want to become independent. He even seemed quite fond of the Blue Guild.

‘Lee Sang-Hee?’

She seemed like she wouldn’t play a big part, but after considering the possibility that Kim Hyun-Sung may have lived here in his past life, I thought that it wouldn’t be so bad to live here.

“Is that what we decided on?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Oppa?” Jung Ha-Yan called out.

“I think we should think about it more and I’m sure we’ll know more about things tomorrow since nothing has been decided yet. It’ll be better to just relax for the time being,” I said.

“He’s right, it’s best to think about the different possibilities. Yes, the different possibilities,” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

He seemed like he was saving his breath. I had no idea what he was thinking about, so I had no choice but to lie on the bed because I immediately started falling asleep since I stayed up last night.

Like Lee Sang-Hee mentioned before, the place had become busy the next morning.

Whatever happened to Lee Ji-Hye and the others at the shelter was none of my business, but I was sure that they had been rescued and were spending time at a different place.

The important matter was…

‘Negotiation.’

And about what they were going to offer…

I was sure that Lee Sang-Hee didn’t get any sleep last night because she was thinking about how much she would have to pay and what kind of support she would need to provide in order to recruit us. To the members that had an important role within the guild, this was probably the most important day for them.

We waited after eating breakfast and washing up before we heard them calling for us.

I thought that maybe the entire guild would try to negotiate with us, but that didn’t happen.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung,” Lee Sang-Hee called out.

"Yes."

Kim Hyun-Sung was the first person to go in.

I had no idea what happened, but after he entered, I heard people clapping.

Jung Ha-Yan and Park Deok-Gu were second and the same thing happened.

It was obvious, but it seemed like they were doing several tests and not just a simple interview.

'I hate this kind of atmosphere… '

It was because it felt like I was about to reveal everything about myself.

I was envious of Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan who exited with a slightly absent-minded look.

Compared to Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan, my stats weren't that great, but if I used magic, then they would find out that I was a trap card.

My stats weren't that bad. There might be a limit to my growth, but if someone looked at my current stats, they would notice that I was a pretty knowledgeable alchemist. My intelligence stat was high and I even possessed magic, which not many people had.

When I thought that maybe they would offer me a similar pay as the others, I heard a voice from inside the room.

"Mr. Ki-Young."

"Yes."

As soon as I opened the door, I saw Lee Sang-Hee and a few other people. I was sure that they had executive roles or were on the recruitment team. An older man fixed his glasses and spoke. "Uh… Mr. Ki-Young's job is… oh, alchemist, right?" he asked.

"Yes, when the second job opened, I picked alchemist," I answered.

I was a bit confused when they looked like they didn't like my job.

Lee Sang-Hee's reaction wasn't that bad, but everyone else either released a sigh or frowned. Based on the atmosphere, I guess they weren't going to use the practice room that was in the inner part of the room.

Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan, they didn't ask me anything. I guess I didn't have to show off my talents or anything because I wasn't the only person that was confused within this slightly cold atmosphere.

Lee Sang-Hee looked at me and smiled brightly as if to lighten the mood.

"We'll make a down payment of 1,500 gold, which is about 150 million won. The contract term will be the same as everyone else, which is seven years and your salary will be 700 gold… what do you think? Of course, you can renegotiate your salary later and if you have any items that you need, we'll do our best to provide them to you," she explained.

What the gramps next to her said next was ridiculous.

"Under the condition that you join with the others."

At this point, I understood what was going on…

'You guys are nothing but trash… '

…They thought I was stupid.

CHAPTER 40
CONTRACT

Honestly, the deal wasn't that bad because it was 150 million won. They were offering 1,500 gold as a down payment and 700 gold was my salary, which meant that my salary would be 70 million won.

I didn't know how rookies were evaluated here yet, but I felt like they were being thoughtful.

The amount that I heard sounded like a large amount, but they weren't welcoming me afterward. I knew they had a lot of reasons for it, but I was sure they didn't know about the fact that my potential stat was below average.

After seeing their status window, I noticed none of them had a similar attribute as Mind's Eye. I was sure that I lost points because of the alchemist job and my relatively low magic stat. I was basically a white elephant because I had little value to them, but they didn't want to dispose of me.

'Right.'

It felt like they were asking, '*Is it really worth it to invest in this one person in order to recruit all the party members?*'

While I was organizing my thoughts, Lee Sang-Hee spoke again. "It doesn't end there. I can't explain it all to you right now, but we've prepared a lot of benefits and you can think of it as being similar to the benefits on Earth. Not only will you be provided with accidental and death insurance, but you can also use the facilities within the guild for free. We can even provide you with a personal trainer. Oh! If you happen to get married and have children, you'll receive basic aid from us. Although, there aren't that many people that get married…"

"Oh, I see. Is there a reason why?" I asked.

"It's probably because we're exposed to unknown threats. The situation may be better than the tutorial dungeon, but monsters and dungeons exist in this place too.

The Blue Guild maintains the guild through dungeon exploration and monster hunting… of course if you go out to hunt, there will be a performance-based system. When you return from the hunt, the monsters' by-products will be divided between the guild and the party members by 40 percent and 60 percent. The exact figures are…"

"So you're saying that we're exposed to danger. Does the down payment and salary include hazard pay?" I asked, interrupting Lee Sang-Hee.

"Yes, I'm sure it's a lot more than you think," she answered.

She was honest and I couldn't help but think about how professional she was.

I wasn't sure how long the earthlings have been living here, but it felt like they had gained a good amount of understanding of this place.

I never imagined that they would even offer insurance here.

'They're smart.'

"If you need a catalyst as an alchemist, then we'll do our best to provide it for you, although it'll be difficult for us to provide items that are expensive…" she said.

"Miss Lee Sang-Hee…" Someone called out.

"It's better to be honest," said that person.

"Hm…"

"These are the things that the Blue Guild can offer," she said.

At least Lee Sang-Hee's attitude wasn't that bad. She seemed like she was respecting me while showing how desperate she was at the same time. However, the old men that were beside her were the problem. They would constantly sigh or would look as if they were grading me, so I was certain that they were nothing more than stagnant, rotting water.

I was sure that they didn't know what kind of relationship I had with Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan. Although I thought that being labeled as comrades that had cleared a dungeon together would hold greater meaning, I guessed that wasn't the case in

the outside world.

'I'm sure it happens often.'

They might have seen people split up after clearing the tutorial dungeon together because of certain conditions, money, or even personal circumstances.

Comrades that had experienced life and death together was putting it nicely.

Considering the fact that we were strangers three months ago, it wasn't impossible to split up because of what was happening around us. Seeing as how even siblings, families, and best friends on Earth could split up due to personal interests, I was sure that the same was applied here.

Of course…

'It doesn't apply to our party.'

I couldn't imagine Park Deok-Gu doing that since we were close, Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't abandon me, and it was the same for Kim Hyun-Sung since he had invested a lot in me. We were closer than they thought and we were intertwined because of an interest, which they didn't know about. Considering this, their attitude towards me was amusing.

I applaud them for making such a great offer in order to recruit the four of us, but if they were really desperate, then they should have been humble about it.

It put me in a bad mood, but at the same time, it didn't. Actually, I found this situation to be very amusing.

'Idiots.'

I wanted them to treat me poorly. I wanted them to look down on me because that would make it more advantageous for me.

"I can't really tell, but it seems like a good offer and I understand that you worked hard on this negotiation," I said.

"Yes, you won't be disappointed," Lee Sang-Hee said.

“Are there non-combatant members within the guild?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

When I brought it up, one of the gramps that was beside her spoke up. “Yes, Mr. Ki-Young. To be frank, an alchemist is categorized as a non-combatant job and I’m sure no other guild will give this kind of offer to an alchemist,” he explained.

“Oh, I see. That’s strange. I’m certain I saw alchemy magic as a choice…” I said.”

“It’s because it’s not that effective. Alchemy magic is activated using a catalyst, but… a monster’s by-product is expensive. Even the magic circles that alchemists use aren’t that effective,” he explained.

“Oh.”

“It’ll be a different story if you have a lot of mana as an alchemist… would it be okay if you told us your magic stat?” he asked.

“It’s eight,” I answered.

“Hm… despite changing your job twice, it’s not that high. Could it be that the growth of your magic stat is a bit slow…”

“You’re right. Compared to my intelligence, it’s not growing as fast. Of course, this is compared to my fellow mage,” I said.

“Ohh… I see. I understand,” he said.

He looked as if that was what he expected. Because of the conversation just now, I deduced that their evaluation of me had gone down. It was as if they were saying that they were only recruiting me because of Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan.

“If you put in a good word when you talk to the others, I’ll make sure you’re taken care of. What do you think?” the grandpa asked.

It was funny to see him quietly push the contract towards me despite what happened. After glancing at the contract, I continued the conversation. “Well, I think I’ll have to think about it some more,” I said.

“What do you…”

“Oh, I’m thinking positively about it, but I was hoping you’d be able to give me some time to think about it,” I said.

“Ohh. I hope you’ll give us your answer as soon as possible since we don’t have a lot of time…” he said.

“Okay, I’ll think about it and let you know as soon as possible,” I told them.

“And I hope you’ll put in a good word for us with the other members,” he added.

“Yes, of course.”

When I tried to stand up, Lee Sang-Hee quickly spoke up. “It’s information that’s included in the Blue Guild’s catalog and the contract. If you read it while thinking about our offer… I’m sure it’ll help,” she suggested.

“I’ll read it later,” I told her.

It wasn’t even worth reading.

‘Because within a few days, all the information is going to change.’

When I exited the room, I saw Park Deok-Gu, Jung Ha-Yan, and Kim Hyun-Sung waiting for me. They looked at me as if they were asking if it went well, but I answered by quietly smiling.

“Hyung-nim, didn’t you go through a test of some sort?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Well, somewhat,” I answered.

“I think they’re actually treating us pretty well,” he said.

“Really?” I asked.

“It’s true, Mr. Ki-Young. I personally did some research and it seems like the other big guilds aren’t offering contracts as good as this one, so I think they’re telling the truth. They’re offering this much despite not seeing our growth potential…” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

“Yes. I think they’re good people, oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“I’m sure they’re somewhat gambling from their side too. They’re probably feeling the pressure because they need to make sure this recruitment is successful since people are resources for them,” Kim Hyun-Sung explained.

They didn’t seem to be like that.

“It may be a bit early to decide, but what do you think? I think it’ll be a bit better to receive complete support from them rather than joining a larger guild,” he said.

“If hyung-nim agrees, then I agree,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Me too…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

As expected, the loyal Deok-Gu and the lovely Ha-Ya wouldn’t abandon me, but the problem was Kim Hyun-Sung. He seemed very fond of the Blue Guild and not only that, but he also seemed to be in a hurry.

Rather than personally creating a force, it felt like he was trying to lay his foundation here. Although if I were him, I would make the same decision.

Personally creating a force had its advantages because not only would the guild adjust based on our orders, but there would be many guilds for us to choose from. However, there was an advantage in joining the Blue Guild too. The advantage was that I would be able to swallow the framework that the guild had been building so far.

It wouldn’t be difficult to make Kim Hyun-Sung or Jung Ha-Yan join the guild’s main force and I was sure that they would adapt really fast.

Kim Hyun-Sung’s decision was definitely reasonable.

“Of course, there’s no need for us to rush. I think it’ll be better to think and talk about it a bit more, but… I kind of like this guild,” Kim Hyun-Sung said as he looked at me for an answer.

I spoke calmly without hesitation. “I think it’ll be better if we think about it for a little bit.”

“Oh… do you not like the guild?” he asked.

“No, it’s not that. It’s just…”

“Yes?” he asked.

“I think we can raise our worth,” I answered.

“Excuse me?”

“I’m talking about our value. Better a castle of bones than of stones. I’m sure there’s a way to increase our worth,” I said.

“Oh…” Kim Hyun-Sung said.

It would be a different story if Kim Hyun-Sung really cherished the Blue Guild, but it didn’t seem to be that way. In the end, he simply needed power.

Seeing his surprised reaction made me think that he was in a hurry, but I guess he must have returned to his senses. Right now, he must have realized his position.

I didn’t know what his plan was, but our party still had some time. Since we completed the tutorial dungeon in record time, I was sure that us bidding our time wouldn’t disrupt the future that Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking about.

“I think I understand… what you mean,” he said.

“Yeah, there’s no need to rush in signing the contract, Mr. Hyun-Sung. The more we drag it out, the more anxious they’ll become,” I said.

Kim Hyun-Sung definitely understood what I said.

“Then… are you saying that we can get more than what we were offered? Honestly, money doesn’t really matter…” Park Deok-Gu said.

“Well, that’s true,” I commented.

“Are you… are you thinking about joining a different guild, hyung-nim?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“Y-You can’t do that oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

“I’m not thinking of doing that because I want to stay with you guys and of course with Mr. Hyun-Sung too. Isn’t that right?” I asked him.

“Yes, although we were brought together through a strange place like this… I would like to stay with Mr. Ki-Young, Mr. Deok-Gu, and Miss Ha-Yan,” he answered.

It was a very heartwarming sight.

When I looked at Kim Hyun-Sung, I couldn’t help but grin.

‘Hyun-Sung, this hyung of yours will help you make a lot of money.’

CHAPTER 41
RAISE OUR WORTH (1)

What the Blue Guild offered us was basically an investment in a scratch card that hadn't been scratched yet. The conditions that they offered were excessive for the new recruits.

I was sure that they were surprised by the fact that a four-man party managed to complete the tutorial dungeon, but despite that, the leaders of the Blue Guild made this kind of offer, making me think that they weren't that stupid after all.

'They're not stupid.'

Actually, they were competent.

When I glanced over, I saw Park Deok-Gu diligently reading something. I couldn't help but speak. "Are you reading the catalog?"

"Well yeah, since we might live here, I thought it would be best to read it… it says here that the restaurant in the guild is pretty amazing," he said.

"Huh?"

"You know, when I was on Earth, there was a star chef named Raymond Park or something and he managed a restaurant… just looking at the dishes in his restaurant made me drool," Park Deok-Gu explained.

"Ohhhh."

"I think the housing here is pretty good too… yeah. What if I became successful in a place like this? I wish my gramps could see me become successful here…" he said.

I wasn't sure if he was being serious when he said that, but I was sure that Park Deok-Gu's grandfather wouldn't want him to live in a place like this.

"The guild seems pretty amazing… so exactly how big are the other guilds?" he

asked.

“I’m sure there isn’t a huge difference. Even though they said that this guild wasn’t like before, I’m sure that they’re doing fine since this is still a well-off guild. If they had some savings when they were still at the peak, I’m sure that they can endure with what they have. But they could be trying to recruit us in order to get back the glory that they had a long time ago…” I explained.

“Wow, I feel special with this kind of treatment. I feel great, hyung-nim,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“We’ll get even better treatment from now on,” I told him.

“Really?”

“Of course,” I said.

It wasn’t going to take long and describing the situation as a scratch card that hadn’t been scratched yet was right. We were the scratch tickets that hadn’t been scratched yet, and they had a high chance of getting a prize by scratching us.

At our current state, we were already offered this much, but once they realized how valuable we were, our worth will increase beyond our imaginations.

“By the way, noonim didn’t look so good… I guess she really doesn’t want to be apart from you. Take good care of her,” Park Deok-Gu said.

“I’ve been doing more than enough without you having to tell me. This has to be done, so there’s nothing I can do,” I said.

“But still…”

‘You don’t have to tell me… ’

Even if Park Deok-Gu hadn’t made plans like what he did back in the dungeon, I knew better than anyone else how important Jung Ha-Yan was. She was one of the reasons why Kim Hyun-Sung’s party was so valuable. It was all thanks to these two—Jung Ha-Yan, a future archmage that possessed legendary-ranked magic stats—and Kim Hyun-Sung, the talented regressor.

A player's potential wasn't defined solely on the growth limit of their stats. It was because a player with high potential stats would experience growth that was much faster than the opposite. My intelligence and luck were like this.

For Jung Ha-Yan, her magic stats increased at an incredible rate. In addition, she already changed her job twice.

'Elemental mage.'

It was the second job she chose after Kim Hyun-Sung and I suggested it to her.

Unlike me who could only choose fire mage among the elements, it seemed like Jung Ha-Yan possessed an affinity to all elements.

I couldn't find an alchemist in her list of jobs.

The attribute that she possessed from the start was *'How to become a mage'* so it obviously encouraged her growth as a mage.

If we considered the quest completion reward, that I had forgotten about, which increased stats by two points. I already knew that she was growing well and that she only needed a small opportunity to make a breakthrough.

I wasn't sure if what happened in the dungeon became a traumatic experience for her, but she had to be enthusiastic.

I also created an unspoken rule that could be placed between me and Jung Ha-Yan. Like a student that would get rewarded for listening well, every time Jung Ha-Yan achieved something, I planned to give her a reward.

'...'

Of course, it was more effective than I imagined. I simply started out with a compliment and little by little, I increased the amount of physical contact between us. At first, all I did was pat her head or interlock our hands, but the more I increased the level of physical contact, she became obsessed with getting achievements. Her goal was to receive compliments and rewards from me rather than to make herself even stronger. When she didn't achieve anything, I reacted coldly towards her, making her quite desperate.

I think what Park Deok-Gu was talking about was the incident earlier. It was all because I didn't meet with her despite the fact that it was almost time for the trial performance.

Jung Ha-Yan was the type of person whose magic stat increased just by eating, so despite working hard to achieve results, if her stats didn't increase, then that would be strange. Out of the four of us, Jung Ha-Yan spent the most time in personal training.

I nodded and continued our conversation from earlier. "If I stay with her, Ha-Yan won't be able to concentrate, so I'm just staying away from her for the time being."

"Ugh… that's true, but…"

"It's a trial performance where the leaders of the Blue Guild and recruiters from other large guilds gather… I don't want to mess things up. But I was going to stay with her anyways once we successfully complete this," I explained.

"I could hear her sobbing every night…" Park Deok-Gu said.

"She needs to learn to be apart from me since I can't always be by her side. This just happens to be the right opportunity since it's only for a week," I said.

"Ugh… I don't understand why they even have this…" Park Deok-Gu complained.

"If we think of ourselves as sports players, it's normal since they have to know exactly how valuable we are in order to set an exact price. It's a bit unfortunate, but… if we mess up because of me, then it won't be good for Ha-Yan either," I explained.

"You know, the more I think about it, the more noonim seems to like you, hyung-nim," he said.

It would've been better if it ended with her just simply liking me, but it had been a while since she crossed that line, and it was all because of Park Deok-Gu's design…

I was curious whether he was pretending not to know or if he really didn't know.

After I stood up, I spoke to Park Deok-Gu. "Let's go."

"Hey, wait for me, hyung-nim," he said.

“Hurry up.”

“Ugh…”

When I started walking, various sceneries passed me by and the feeling was totally different from the tutorial dungeon. I felt classy, safe, and well-treated.

When I looked out the window, I saw the survivors from the shelter gathering and doing something. They were probably getting basic training or training that was necessary in this place. I did think about Lee Ji-Hye for a brief moment, but I ignored it and when I started walking again, I saw the inside of the tourney hall.

There were a lot of people and of course, I looked around using Mind’s Eye.

Before I looked around to see if their stats were high or low, I noticed that the clothes they were wearing were pretty fancy. But it wasn’t just the leaders of the Blue Guild, the others raised different flags and like directors of a large company, the way they looked around the hall made them seem like they played an important role within a large guild.

‘Recruiters?’

Yeah, they were probably recruiters. I followed their gaze and saw that they were looking at Jung Ha-Yan, who looked really nervous. It felt like it had been a while since I saw her like that.

When the Blue Guild’s first negotiation finished, it was decided a week earlier that they were going to open the trial performance.

Excluding the times when I checked up on her, it had been three days since I saw Jung Ha-Yan. If someone asked me what was the big deal with not seeing her for three days, I wouldn’t have an answer, but to Jung Ha-Yan, it seemed like a painful time.

“Don’t you think that she lost some weight?” Park Deok-Gu asked.

“A little,” I said.

She looked more tired than thin. I guess what Park Deok-Gu said about her crying every night was true because her eyes were red. I told her that I would come to the

trial performance to see her, so it seemed like she made herself look presentable, but her overall condition didn't look so good. I guess she was looking for me because she kept looking around. Jung Ha-Yan looked anxious and the people watching started whispering.

"Hm… I had high expectations…"

"She doesn't look so good, right?"

"It's probably because she's nervous. And… it hasn't been that long since she came out from the dungeon, so putting that into consideration, she doesn't look that bad."

"I was looking forward to it since she completed the dungeon in record time… I think her mentality is…"

I didn't know who the voice belonged to, but they were right about her.

'This isn't good… '

No matter how I looked at her, she looked anxious.

I thought that Jung Ha-Yan would be able to find us on the second floor, but she looked nervous as usual. In the end, when I slightly raised my hand, I saw her smiling brightly towards me.

'Don't mess it up.'

This event was that important.

"Ahem. If Miss Jung Ha-Yan is ready, please signal…"

Jung Ha-Yan nodded when she heard the voice.

The way she started reciting the spell slowly made her look a bit unstable because she looked as if she was praying to someone and was hoping that everything would go well. When I saw the people clicking their tongues again, I thought that maybe my plan would fail.

The moment I started having regrets and thought, *'Did I push her too much,'* I felt a flow of magic that was beyond my imagination.

“Huh?”

“Huuh…?”

It was ridiculous, but I saw the dust around Jung Ha-Yan starting to fly around. It surprised me to see that she was able to do that just by moving the mana that was within her body.

I wasn’t sure what she was reciting, but the chant was pretty long.

The leaders of the large guilds that had clicked their tongues were watching Jung Ha-Yan with their mouths open. From time to time, I could hear their bewildered remarks.

“Report this immediately! Hurry!”

“Hey! Hurry up and bring me her profile!”

It was definitely surprising, no, my mouth opened wider than theirs from the start. I expected that there she would have some kind of achievement, but I never imagined that it would be this impactful.

The longer the chant was, the louder their murmurs became.

I saw Lee Sang-Hee of the Blue Guild sitting far away and she was watching Jung Ha-Yan as if she didn’t know what was going on because until a week ago, she wasn’t like this.

‘What is she… ’

“E-Elemental Bomb.”

Booooooooom!

With a loud sound, a vibration emerged from Jung Ha-Yan’s hand. It sounded extremely grating to the ears that I had to cover my ears. I felt like my eardrums were about to rupture, so I quickly used magic to cover my ears.

The unknown magic flew towards the large target located at the center of the hall. It pierced through the target whilst vibrating and the trail that connected it from Jung

Ha-Yan to the large target was left in a mess.

“What the…”

Booooooooooom!

The large target vanished when the second explosion reverberated. The cheers had disappeared as well.

But the silence that filled the halls was louder than any cheers.

“What… is she…”

Park Deok-Gu quietly spoke.

“Hyung-nim.”

“…”

“Is this for real?” he asked.

He took the words out of my mouth. I had no idea what kind of reward I should give her for this.

CHAPTER 42
RAISE OUR WORTH (2)

It was difficult for me to understand what had happened.

I guess I wasn't the only one who thought that Jung Ha-Yan outputted more power than everyone imagined. The silence of the hall was naturally broken as the crowd erupted into a clamor.

"Did you bring her profile?"

"How far did you say her negotiation with the Blue Guild went?"

"We're definitely recruiting her. What about the guild master?"

"They said that they didn't care about the down payment and have already approved it."

"What has the guild's recruitment team been doing all this time? Don't you have more detailed data? You didn't even get anything from the Blue Guild?"

"I-I'm sorry."

"Damn it. Do you think this can be resolved with your apology? Bastards… you useless bastards…"

I guess there was a system where they were able to communicate with someone that was located far away.

This was the reaction that I was expecting, no, it was more than I expected. I could tell because the guild leaders that were trying to look tough earlier had become excited as they tried to obtain her data as fast as possible. Not only did they ask for Jung Ha-Yan's profile, but I could see them already preparing for the recruitment war. I even saw large guilds approaching the Blue Guild.

As the guild that had the first negotiation rights, they were also thinking about

negotiating with the Blue Guild, and of course, Lee Sang-Hee and the leaders became flustered.

They must have realized by now that we were scratch tickets that hadn't been scratched yet, but I was certain they didn't expect this much of a reaction because they looked like they didn't know how to handle this sudden situation.

When I turned my head with a smile, I saw Jung Ha-Yan who seemed very happy. I was sure that she knew that she had succeeded. The way she looked at me while clasping her hands looked kind of cute.

I was curious to see her growth. When I looked at her status window using Mind's Eye, her status immediately popped up before me.

[Checking Player Jung Ha-Yan's status window and potential.]

[Name - Jung Ha-Yan]

[Title - None. Please work harder.]

[Age - 21]

[Nature - Innocent Supporter]

[Job - Elemental Mage - Rare Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic magic knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate magic knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Agility - 11/Below rare growth limit]

[Stamina - 16/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 29/Above epic growth limit]

[Endurance - 14/Below rare growth limit]

[Luck - 25/Above epic growth limit]

[Magic - 31/Above legendary growth limit]

[Gear - Divine Healing - Rare Rank]

[Attribute - How to become a mage - Epic Rank]

[Overall Review - Amazing. The increase in her magic points is the most noticeable. She is showing an incomprehensible rate of growth, but the fact that her stats aren't increasing evenly can be considered as her weakness. Player Lee Ki-Young is a lucky person. Make sure to always stay by her side. That's the answer if you want to survive. You just have to be careful while on this high-quality boat.]

'Her magic stat is 31?'

It was a ridiculous number. Honestly, I couldn't tell whether that number was high or not because when I saw the magic stat of other mages, they were all different. The lowest I saw had 60 points and the highest had 80 points.

I had no idea how long they had been in this world, but when I saw the surprised looks on their faces, they must have realized that Jung Ha-Yan's growth rate was abnormal.

No, more than that…

'Is it possible to release that much power with a magic stat of 31?'

I recalled how her chant was kind of long, so it was right for me to think that she customized her magic. It seemed to consume a lot of mana because she looked

exhausted after executing it. Despite that, when I saw the lively atmosphere around me, it showed that the power that Jung Ha-Yan had revealed just now was difficult to explain using common sense.

“The… demonstration is ove…”

Before the host could finish their sentence, I saw Jung Ha-Yan running towards me. When Jung Ha-Yan left the hall, there was a crowd around her, but I guess she didn’t really care.

‘You should at least get their business cards… ’

I couldn’t help but become flustered when she ran to the second floor.

“Oppa!” she called out.

I guess she knew that she was going to get a reward for her success because she was overly excited. If I considered the fact that we hadn’t seen each other for a week by now, it was understandable for her to react in this manner.

“Good job, Ha-Yan,” I said, complimenting her.

“O-Oppa…”

“It must’ve been hard for you,” I said.

“I’m fine. It wasn’t… hard at all,” she said.

She even started crying. I was a bit worried because she was showing this side of her in a public place, but the leaders of the Blue Guild and the large guilds were all looking this way.

‘It’s not bad. Actually, this is better.’

It wasn’t a bad idea to show that we were close, so when I slightly opened my arms, she quickly ran into them. Jung Ha-Yan looked like she had high expectations, but there wasn’t really anything I could do for her.

As time passed, the eyes that were on us started to make me feel embarrassed. But Jung Ha-Yan looked as if she wanted her reward right now, which made me feel

awkward.

'Oh… '

It was obvious, but I wasn't that brave to show my physical affection towards her in public.

"Hey, hyung-nim! Give her a big kiss!" Park Deok-Gu yelled.

Seeing him cheering for me was a sight to see. When Park Deok-Gu encouraged me to kiss her, Jung Ha-Yan looked at me as if she was expecting something more.

'Jung Ha-Yan… '

I had mentioned this before, but Jung Ha-Yan wasn't dumb. Even though she hadn't said it, I was sure that…

'I should be rewarded since I managed to do this much. I even managed to be patient for a week. I should be rewarded, right?' was what she was probably thinking. No… it felt more like she wanted to make things official in public. Jung Ha-Yan probably wanted to tell everyone, *'He's mine.'*

Even though I didn't want to, I felt like I had to do something so after thinking it through, I carefully placed my hands on her cheeks and I then saw her pursing her lips. I contemplated for a bit and of course, moving too fast wasn't a good thing.

When I lightly kissed her forehead, I felt her trembling harshly. All I did was place my lips on her forehead, but it was more effective than I imagined.

'It hurts… '

Not only was she hugging me so tightly that my back started to hurt, but my legs started to tremble as well. When I slightly looked down, her face had turned redder than I imagined.

The serious look on her face made her seem dangerous, but I thought that it didn't matter all that much.

Of course, I could feel everyone's gaze on me and Jung Ha-Yan. Obviously, we looked like a couple that cared for each other. It was a picturesque sight.

At this point, even the host became flustered. The leaders of the Blue Guild looked as if something went wrong.

"Um… Miss Jung Ha-Yan's demonstration has ended. For the special guests, please do not leave your seats and follow the procedure after the schedule… has been completed. Next, we'll be watching Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung's demonstration, who is a member of the same party that participated in the recent tutorial dungeon. The demonstration will be a spar…"

"Ha-Yan, we should watch Mr. Hyun-Sung's demonstration," I said.

"Oh… huh? Okay… oppa," she answered in disappointment.

As if she didn't want to be apart from me any longer, she turned her head while holding onto me. It was a bit uncomfortable, but it wasn't to the point that I couldn't endure it. To be honest, this was actually a suitable reward for Jung Ha-Yan. I felt a bit embarrassed because she kept burying her head into my chest, but when Kim Hyun-Sung appeared with his sword, I saw her quietly looking down.

"Jeez, I feel left out… I should get myself a girlfriend or something…" Park Deok-Gu complained.

"Just focus on the demonstration, Deok-Gu because I'm sure it'll be worth watching," I said.

"I've been watching without you telling me, hyung-nim. Kim Hyun-Sung, that dude… well…"

"Please give us the signal if you're ready."

Kim Hyun-Sung slightly raised his hand.

"Then, we'll start."

When they hosted a demonstration, I knew that jobs that were part of the warrior category demonstrated their skills through spars while jobs that were part of the mage category demonstrated their magic to the crowd, but Kim Hyun-Sung's opponent didn't look so easy to defeat. First of all, their stats were higher than Kim Hyun-Sung's and even though they called it a spar, I think training spar was a better description. Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung probably didn't think that way in the first

place.

His opponent's face turned stiff when Kim Hyun-Sung slowly grabbed his sword. After seeing Jung Ha-Yan, he probably realized that we weren't an ordinary party, but he seemed like he felt something else entirely.

It only took a moment for the two to instantly vanish and a battle that was difficult to watch with my own eyes commenced.

This was the second demonstration after Jung Ha-Yan.

I guess the special guests that came here today had a lot of things to be surprised about because as the battle continued, I noticed their eyes widening with time.

'Did they think that it was because of Jung Ha-Yan?'

They were probably thinking that Jung Ha-Yan was the one that had the real power within our party. Little did they know that the true powerhouse was someone else.

'Ha!'

When I saw the special guests opening their mouths wide, I couldn't help but laugh to myself.

The sound of swords clashing was the only sound that could I hear so I knew that they weren't simply brushing their swords against each other.

'Good job!'

I already knew that our lovely regressor was strong, but this was my first time seeing him fighting in all seriousness. It was to the point that it was overwhelming. But when I saw his opponent's face as their swords clashed, I was able to figure out the answer.

Kim Hyun-Sung's opponent was sweating a lot and as if he was in a panic, I saw him use his magic.

Honestly, I knew nothing about swordsmanship, but I knew this.

'Kim Hyun-Sung is strong.'

Not long after, Kim Hyun-Sung's opponent's sword went flying into the air, and just when I thought that maybe he was showing too much of his skills, Kim Hyun-Sung also dropped his sword. His opponent didn't give up and started swinging his fist. The moment he used his arm that held his sword earlier to push Kim Hyun-Sung away, I heard a loud sound. Naturally, Kim Hyun-Sung flew to the other side.

"Oh."

Boom!

When I saw Kim Hyun-Sung stuck to a wall, I felt that something went wrong, but after seeing him dust himself off calmly, I realized that he simply wanted to show his opponent that his endurance stat wasn't that bad.

"I lost," Kim Hyun-Sung's opponent said.

'That was clean, you sly fox!'

He showed all of his strengths without revealing all of his cards.

I wanted to praise him for showing that he was overwhelmed at some point, regardless of his stats. Kim Hyun-Sung had recently come out of the tutorial dungeon after all, so if he easily defeated a veteran, then I was sure that the special guests here would think that something was strange.

Regardless of how long the sparring lasted, Kim Hyun-Sung had done his best to show his skills.

I could hear the sound of people clapping ever so slowly while the leaders of the large guilds looked a bit agitated. I wanted to say that Jung Ha-Yan left a bigger impact on these people than Kim Hyun-Sung, but what he showed was definitely different than what Jung Ha-Yan revealed.

Even though I couldn't watch properly with my own eyes, the people with close-ranged jobs that were holding their weapons looked flabbergasted by Kim Hyun-Sung's performance.

"Wow…"

"Genius…"

I could tell by the comments that I heard.

“Well… Mr. Kim Hyun-Sung’s demonstration has… finished. Special guests… p-please follow the procedure…”

The special guests couldn’t hear what the host was saying.

When Kim Hyun-Sung’s demonstration came to an end. I saw people approaching him and of course, he wasn’t the only one that was bound to become a star today.

“Can we talk for a moment?”

“…”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young? And Miss Jung Ha-Yan. If it’s not too much trouble, can you spare… I’m Cha Hee-Ra of the Red Mercenary Guild.”

As the gigolo of the talented, genius mage, she also had to talk to me.

‘This is what I’m talking about… ’

I was in a situation where I couldn’t hide my smile.

Surprisingly, the woman with red hair was the one that wanted to exchange handshakes.

I wasn’t sure if her philosophy was exposure equaled defense, but I couldn’t help but look at her bold outfit.

‘Wow… ’

CHAPTER 43
CRAZY WOMAN (1)

I was in a situation where I couldn't hide my smile.

Surprisingly, the woman with red hair was the one that wanted to exchange handshakes.

I wasn't sure if her philosophy was exposure equaled defense, but I couldn't help but look at her bold outfit.

'Ah… '

I instantly realized that I made a mistake when I noticed Jung Ha-Yan staring at me along with this woman named Cha Hee-Ra. I usually acted carefully when it came to things like this, but I couldn't deal with it this time due to an *irresistible* force.

'That's because… '

Her outfit showed her chest and abdomen, she was confident in her appearance and body and I wasn't sure whether she dyed her hair or it was because of magic, but her red hair and red lips gave off a strange erotic feel. This blunder was all because of her attractive look.

I closed my eyes for a moment and when I used Mind's Eye, I instantly saw her stats.

[Checking Player Cha Hee-Ra's status window and potential.]

[Name - Cha Hee-Ra]

[Title - Madwoman Crazy About Blood, Red Mercenary, Holy Empire's Red Madwoman]

[Age - 28]

[Nature - Unpredictable Innovator]

[Job - Mercenary Queen - Legendary Rank]

[Job Effect - Acquired basic swordsmanship knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired intermediate weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced dual weapon knowledge]

[Job Effect - Acquired advanced magic operation knowledge]

[Stats]

[Strength - 97/Above legendary growth limit]

[Agility - 82/Below epic growth limit]

[Stamina - 85/Below epic growth limit]

[Intelligence - 67/Above rare growth limit]

[Endurance - 90/Above epic growth limit]

[Luck - 56/Above rare growth limit]

[Magic - 82/Below epic growth limit]

[Gear - None]

[Attribute - Madwoman Crazy About Blood - Epic Rank]

[Overall Review - Cha Hee-Ra is somewhat of a dangerous woman for you to become close with. Be careful not to get ripped to shreds.]

Her job was a legendary-ranked mercenary queen and her title was *a madwoman crazy about blood*. I didn't have a good feeling about her. Her *unpredictable innovator* nature also gave off the worst vibe.

'Her stats are… '

Her 97 points strength and 90 points endurance were impressive, making her stronger than Lee Sang-Hee. However, her stats were pretty similar to Lee Sang-Hee's, so I thought I could consider their stats as the *high standard* around here. Cha Hee-Ra had stats that were over 90 points and a job, as well as an epic-ranked item. I was sure that there were many more conditions to consider someone as high standard, but this was probably the minimum.

Truthfully, the way she quietly extended her hand out for a handshake with a smile on her face made her look charming, but I couldn't express that because Jung Ha-Yan looked uncomfortable. Of course, she wasn't being obvious about it.

I was certain that she realized that she wouldn't be able to handle Cha Hee-Ra just yet. I thought that Jung Ha-Yan had matured a bit, but the way she grabbed tightly onto my arm made it seem like she didn't want me to shake Cha Hee-Ra's hand.

'Still… '

She was a special guest from a large guild.

'Let go of me… Ha-Yan… '

I couldn't let her embarrass me in a situation like this.

Although it was difficult for me to move my hand because Jung Ha-Yan's hand was grabbing tightly onto my arm, I shook her hand off for a moment as if I was asking her to be thoughtful just this once before I shook Cha Hee-Ra's hand.

"Nice to meet you, my name is Lee Ki-Young."

"It's really an honor for me to be able to meet the stars of this round," Cha Hee-Ra

said.

“Nice… to meet you. I’m… Jung Ha-Yan.”

“Your demonstration just now was very impressive,” she complimented.

“Thank… you,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

She sounded like she was out of breath and when I let go of Cha Hee-Ra’s hand, Jung Ha-Yan must have felt relieved because she instantly grabbed my arm.

“You guys must be really close. Did you know each other before coming here?” she asked.

“No, it’s not like that. We first saw each other in the tutorial dungeon and afterward, we became closer and have maintained a good relationship since then,” I answered.

“I’m really envious,” Cha Hee-Ra said.

I had a really difficult time deciding where I should look.

‘Isn’t she embarrassed?’

It was obvious, but I didn’t think that the source of her confidence came from her looks. Revealing more than half of her breast may simply be her preference, but from the way she acted, her confidence seemed to be from herself—from being player Cha Hee-Ra, the mercenary queen.

That was how strong she was. She was the strongest from the people that I’ve seen so far and I wasn’t simply talking about her stats. I could tell because even as we were talking right now, no one dared to come close to her.

“Oh… I think I should introduce myself again. My name is Cha Hee-Ra and I’m the leader of the Red Mercenary Guild and my job is mercenary queen.”

‘As expected.’

“Oh, you came.”

“Yes, I have a huge interest in talented people, and I heard that a lot of talented

people came this time… I also had free time," Cha Hee-Ra said.

"Oh, I see. Thank you for the compliment."

"Of course," she said.

"But, I don't think you're allowed to talk to them. From what I've heard, the Blue Guild still has the negotiation rights…"

"Oh my… this isn't a negotiation. We are simply talking. Of course, I'll eventually talk to them about recruitment, but the Red Mercenary Guild respects the Blue Guild's negotiation rights. You can think of me as an adviser that helps people make reasonable choices," she explained.

"Ahhhh."

She was basically saying that she was going to whitewash.

Since we weren't negotiating yet, Cha Hee-Ra was trying to talk about how much she was willing to match the contract we received from the Blue Guild and it wasn't just us.

Park Deok-Gu was also talking to a man that appeared out of nowhere while Kim Hyun-Sung was surrounded by people.

The Blue Guild could only feel agitated and they were showing what a powerless guild looked like. If the Blue Guild had the power to control the special guests, this wouldn't have happened in the first place and of course, I didn't feel any sympathy towards them. It had nothing to do with me since I wasn't affiliated with any guilds and creating connections here was a more reasonable decision.

"I'm sure there's a lot of things you don't know about. Usually, the guilds that have the first negotiation rights have a strong tendency to restrict information about other guilds… do you know anything about the Red Mercenary Guild that I'm managing…"

"I haven't heard about it," I answered.

"Oh my, then I guess I have no choice but to give you a bit of information. The Red Mercenary Guild is made up of people that have close-range jobs. Like the name

states, we're a mercenary guild, so not only do we accept a variety of requests, but we hunt dungeons and monsters and participate in small-scale battles and wars when we receive a request," Cha Hee-Ra explained.

"Oh, close-ranged jobs…"

"Yes. To be exact, we used to be a mercenary guild that was made up of close-ranged jobs," she said.

"So you're saying that you're seeking change," I said.

"That's correct. It's difficult to explain the details, but we train mages and priests within the guild and there's a movement about how we need to invest in support jobs as well. This may be a different topic, but we're currently investing a lot of money into it. Compared to the other guilds, we're a bit late, so the managers of the guild have been urging us to invest that much more… the reason why I came here was because of our investors…" she explained.

"Ohhh, I see," I said.

I think I knew what she was trying to say.

"I'm curious as to how much you're planning on investing."

"It'll make it easier if I tell you in Korean won, right?" Cha Hee-Ra asked.

"Yes, for now…" I replied.

She smiled brightly and continued the conversation. "Two billion won."

'Oh… '

"Sorry?"

"Two billion per person. We're also preparing an additional budget in case of an emergency and of course, we're planning on continuously investing in the future. Don't you think we need to spend at least 500 million won a year to get good results?" she asked.

She was basically saying that the down payment was two billion won and the salary

was 500 million won and if I were to convert it to the currency that was used here, the down payment would be 20,000 gold and a salary of 5,000 gold. Considering the fact that she mentioned an additional budget, I guess they were thinking about providing more than what was mentioned.

I became flustered to the point that I couldn't speak properly.

'Two billion won?'

Compared to the amount that the Blue Guild offered, the gap was so big that it was ridiculous. I expected our worth to increase, but the price roughly jumped 20 times and the salary increased five times. It was to the point that I wondered if the bastards of the Blue Guild had been thinking of us as pushovers.

I now understood why the parties that cleared the dungeon together ended up separating because after hearing an amount this large, it was understandable to be tempted by it.

It was two billion won. An amount that an ordinary person could never get even if they worked for it throughout their entire life.

I even started to calculate what it would be like if I joined Cha Hee-Ra's guild.

"However… it may be a bit difficult to invest in all of you since you all have close-range jobs. We're actually overdoing it as well…" she mentioned.

"Oh."

"Our guild has a lot of talented people and it's not like we don't have an interest in people like Kim Hyun-Sung, but… we want to focus on one area," she said.

This wasn't good.

"I see," I said.

"I think you and Miss Ha-Yan may be slightly interested in our guild's current project… so I would like to ask for your opinion," she requested.

Cha Hee-Ra was telling us to abandon both Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu and join her guild. Since the guild was created by people that had close-ranged jobs,

swordsmen and tankers were saturated so I understood why she didn't want to invest in Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung. She was already the perfect shield and sword and even if I were in her position, I would have taken a bigger interest in Jung Ha-Yan.

"The project itself sounds very exciting, but I'm a bit worried that we won't be of any help. We've also gotten close to the members that we cleared the tutorial dungeon with… so focusing on one area is…" I explained.

"Hm… that's unexpected," Cha Hee-Ra commented.

She looked a bit excited and for some reason, I felt like a rat that couldn't move in front of a scary cat.

"It would've been nice if I could afford to invest in other areas, but… our guild has been in a tough situation recently. We usually don't hold back people that want to leave, but this is really unfortunate. The same goes for Miss Jung Ha-Yan, but… Lee Ki-Young, I'm a bit disappointed…" she said.

"What…"

"A present for you," Cha Hee-Ra said.

When she got close to me, I felt her putting something into my hand. I didn't check it properly, but it seemed like an item.

'A bribe?'

I decided to look the other way and think that she simply gave me a gift. I started feeling better because the gift was from the woman that was the leader of a large guild, so I was sure that it was a pretty valuable item.

"Let me know anytime if you change your mind and even if it isn't because of that, I would like to maintain a good relationship between us. Since we're both affiliated under the same empire, don't you think we'll see each other often when we go into dungeons or stand in the front lines? Also… hm… Miss Ha-Yan?" she called out.

"…"

"You need to learn to suppress your bloodthirstiness, Miss Ha-Yan," Cha Hee-Ra

commented.

“Oh…”

It only took her a moment to get close to me and before I had the time to be surprised, I felt something moist on my lips.

‘This crazy… ’

I momentarily didn’t know how to react because of her sudden action.

I quickly tried to push her away using my hands, but there was no way that my weak body would be able to push Cha Hee-Ra when her strength was 97.

To make things worse, I felt something entering my mouth. I was so flustered that I became speechless. I looked at Jung Ha-Yan while making a fuss, but I didn’t feel any flow of mana or bloodthirstiness from her. She looked as if the world had come to an end as she stood there in a daze because of the unexpected situation.

“That was a present too. I’ll see you later,” Cha Hee-Ra said.

‘Damn it.’

The people around looked at us because of the sudden noise and even Park Deok-Gu looked surprised. I wasn’t sure why he also looked as if the world had come to an end, but I needed to fix this as soon as possible.

‘I’m doomed.’

CHAPTER 44
CRAZY WOMAN (2)

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, please give us a signal once you're ready."

When I slightly raised my hand, I could feel everyone looking at me. Kim Hyun-Sung, Park Deok-Gu, and Jung Ha-Yan were looking at me from the second floor. I felt a bit nervous because everyone in this place was focused on me, but I didn't feel pressured about showing a different side of me because I knew that the leaders of the Blue Guild didn't have high expectations to begin with.

"I'm ready," I said.

I was actually more worried about Jung Ha-Yan because she strangely remained quiet, making it hard for me to guess what she was thinking. I wasn't sure if it was because of Park Deok-Gu, who was getting angry for her, but she acted as if the incident yesterday never happened.

'I'm feeling anxious... '

I had no idea why that crazy woman acted the way she did because it didn't seem like she had feelings for me. Cha Hee-Ra probably did it because she wanted to tease Jung Ha-Yan for expressing her bloodthirstiness. I was sure that she also did it as a way to warn Jung Ha-Yan for expressing her bloodthirstiness towards a guild leader and if kissing me was her punishment, then Jung Ha-Yan got off easy. It was just the method itself was questionable.

Honestly, I wanted to thank that crazy woman because we were in a situation where we should be thankful for the fact that she didn't cut our heads off.

I cleared my head from the slightly complicated thoughts. I slowly drew a magic circle on the ground. It was a pretty complicated process, but it was a magic circle that was already in my head.

'It's inefficient.'

It didn’t consume as much mana, but it was still inefficient.

I completed the magic circle quickly and my actions must have seemed familiar because I saw a few people nodding.

“Lord, I, hope, answer, my voice,” I chanted.

The magic circle was the one that was building the magic and as soon as I recited the chant, I felt mana flowing out of me.

“Fire Pillar.”

When I cast the spell, a pillar of fire shot out from the magic circle and burned the target, but it wasn’t a firepower that I was able to materialize using my magic. It was a pretty impressive effect and with the help of the magic circle, I knew I could be more efficient than when I used the magic that I possessed.

“Whew…”

Their cheers weren't as loud as Park Deok-Gu’s, who demonstrated before me, as well as Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan’s, who demonstrated yesterday, however…

Clap, clap clap.

I could hear a few claps as everyone nodded and started clapping as well. It wasn’t a bad demonstration, but it wasn’t worthy of applause. However, there was one thing that the crowd wanted. They probably wanted to look good in front of me since I seemed like our party’s hidden influential figure to the others.

“Thank you,” I said.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young’s demonstration has ended. For the special guests, please move according to the procedure.”

It was the same as yesterday. As if they didn’t care about the procedure, the special guests and recruiters started crowding around me.

“My name is Lee Yeon-Hee and I manage the Four Stars Guild. If we can talk… no, let me give you my business card first,” she said.

“I’m Jung Jong-Chul and I’m the master of Clan of Clan. If you don’t mind…” he said.

“I’m Go Young-Soo. Our clan is a new clan that was recently created and even though our offer may not be as good, compared to the other clans, our potential growth is…”

“My name is Park Hye-Soo and I’m the representative of the Devil’s Guild. I would like to speak with you for a bit…”

Greeting each and every person was a lot of work, but they were all valuable potential prospects. Regardless of whether the clan was recently created or if it was a guild in the middle of a decline, they were all important, so I received their business cards and had a formal conversation with them.

“If you’re not planning on signing the contract with the Blue Guild…”

“Yes, I’ll be sure to visit later,” I said.

“Our guild too.”

“Sure, let’s have a meal together later,” I suggested.

“No matter which guild you choose, I would like to maintain a good relationship.”

“Okay, I’ll make sure to contact you first,” I told them.

It was a formal conversation, but it wasn’t that bad. If someone asked me what was so great about exchanging a simple greeting, I wouldn’t have an answer to that, but this sort of thing was important when it came to human relationships.

“It was a fun demonstration.”

‘Bullshit… ’

“I think this demonstration changed my perception about alchemists, hahaha.”

‘Lies.’

“Thank you, everyone. I’m a bit embarrassed because compared to my other party members, I didn’t display as much,” I told them.

Still, this was what having a social life was about.

When I walked out of the crowd, I saw Lee Sang-Hee and the leaders of the Blue Guild looking at me and of course, they were frowning. They realized that they made a mistake in the first negotiation. They also realized the fact that Kim Hyun-Sung believed in my words more than theirs.

We stayed here for over a week and there were a lot of opportunities for me to meet the guests. We ate together and heard basic information about the Continent. If they saw our party having a normal conversation, I was sure that they would come to one conclusion.

'That Lee Ki-Young's position within Kim Hyun-Sung's party is a lot higher than they imagined.'

"Could we talk to you for a moment? There's something we need to discuss with you again regarding the terms of negotiation…" Lee Sang-Hee said.

"Of course, Miss Lee Sang-Hee. I welcome it," I told her.

"Let's head inside," she suggested.

"Okay."

I actually wanted to start humming.

I guess Jung Ha-Yan, Park Deok-Gu, and Kim Hyun-Sung were talking with other people. When I entered the room where we discussed the conditions back then, I noticed a change in the atmosphere compared to before. It felt like the arrogant gramps was watching me closely.

'This is nice.'

I wondered if this was what it felt like to have power.

"First, I would like to apologize for the hasty adjustment from our first negotiation. We thought that the terms that we offered were generous for rookies, but… after watching your demonstrations, we realized that we underestimated you as well as the rest of your party," she explained.

“Oh, it’s fine. I definitely understand. As someone who manages the guild, it’s only natural for you to avoid investing in people with unverified skills. It was definitely a reasonable decision,” I said.

“Oh, thank you very much for your understanding.”

“…”

“I’m sure you’ve received offers from a lot of different places,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

I didn’t think there was a need to lie because it was a truth that everyone knew.

“Yes, that’s right.”

“I don’t know what the other guilds offered you, but the Blue Guild…”

I didn’t really hear what she was trying to explain, but it was obvious where this conversation was heading. An excuse about how the amount they were offering may not be enough, but that they had the potential to grow. She may probably mention how the Blue Guild was different, as well as the special conditions they could add to the contract and plans on how they were going to help us grow. It was obvious.

“Compared to the other guilds, the amount may not be enough, but within the Holy Empire, the Blue Guild is still one of the known guilds. If you join the Blue Guild, we’ll set aside a budget for the party… oh, not only that. We can offer an executive position within the guild…” she explained.

“Specifically…”

“It’s a bit difficult for me to explain the specifics right now, but we’ll do our best…”

“I see. Could you tell me the details of the contract?” I asked, cutting her off.

“Oh! Of course,” she answered.

Lee Sang-Hee looked a bit happy.

“We can provide a down payment of 10,000 gold and a salary of 3,000 gold. The duration of the contract will be 10 years… and you can negotiate your salary and renew your contract every year…”

“So that’s 10 billion won,” I said.

“Yes.”

It was only half of what the Red Mercenary Guild was offering. Of course, the guild didn’t include Kim Hyun-Sung and Park Deok-Gu, but I couldn’t help but feel bitter about it because I knew that it costs a lot of money to become an alchemist.

What caught my attention was the fact that they increased the duration by three years. I assumed it was because they wanted to see our growth.

If this was their first offer, however, then it meant that there was room to increase it a little bit more because that was what Cha Hee-Ra also said when I spoke with her.

When discussing a contract, the desperate side was usually the anxious ones.

I spoke with a smile on my face. “A down payment of 15,000 gold, which is one and half billion won. That’s the term that we want,” I said.

“Oh…”

“Additionally, I would at least like an epic ranked alchemist tool, an adjustment on the by-products halving that we obtain from a hunt, an epic ranked grimoire for Jung Ha-Yan and I would also like for you to provide epic ranked basic gear for Park Deok-Gu and Kim Hyun-Sung,” I explained.

“That… that’s…”

“You can think of it as an investment because our party is going to grow even more. The reason why we’re not obsessed with the salary is because the more our growth accelerates, the Blue Guild will also grow. I think you may even receive investments from other guilds,” I said.

“Due to our circumstances…”

“If you need gold, you can sell the first negotiation rights to another guild, but right now, gold isn’t what’s important to the Blue Guild, right?” I asked.

They looked as if I hit the enail.

“The guild master,” I said.

Of course, I noticed the fact that I haven’t seen the guild master just yet despite what was happening right now. The record time clearing of the tutorial dungeon incited not only the mid-sized guilds but also the masters of the large guilds. When looking at Cha Hee-Ra, it was obvious that she came here herself to make an offer.

The fact that the guild master was missing despite the disturbances meant that there was currently a problem within the guild.

“You’ve… noticed. Did someone…” Lee Sang-Hee said.

“It’s a simple deduction. It is only natural for me to have this thought since I still haven’t met them,” I explained.

The Blue Guild will accept my offer.

Including the guild master, if there was a problem with the main power of the guild, I was sure that they were very happy to have us here since we had the potential to grow above the leadership level.

Just when I thought that I made a slight mistake…

“Arrogant…”

It wasn’t Lee Sang-Hee. One of the gramps that was beside her was staring at me with angry eyes.

‘Um… ’

“Alchemist, we’re not investing in you,” he said.

“Mr. Seol-Ho. What are you doing?!” Lee Sang-Hee yelled.

“Miss Lee Sang-Hee, the Blue Guild will not fall to the point that we need to be teased by him,” the gramps said.

‘That… ’

“He’s an immature person that’s been here for less than a year. I know we’re in a

position that needs to yield, but to yield to a persona like him!" the old man yelled.

"Please withdraw your magic!" she said.

'Damn it… '

I understood what it felt like when someone used magic with bloodthirstiness. Because the old man's magic filled the entire room, my body started to shake and even breathing became difficult.

All I could think about was, *'I'm going to die.'*

"Lee Seol-Ho! I told you to withdraw your magic!" Lee Sang-Hee yelled again.

"You piece of shit… I know people like you very well. The kind that are headstrong despite not having anything. A variety of people come here and I've lived long enough on this continent, you don't think I've seen enough rats like you?" the old man yelled.

"Ugh…"

"Killing people like you without a sound is easy. This continent is always overflowing with threats. No one knows when and where something will happen because this place is different from Earth. You dumb, immature child… know your place! How dare you act like that towards the Blue Guild… how dare you!" he said.

'I'm really going to die.'

I found it difficult to breathe. I couldn't understand what kind of situation I was in.

'That damn… old man… '

I wanted to run out of the room this instant, but it was difficult to even move my body, let alone stand up and run. When I was at the point where I had to make a choice, I had no choice but to pick one out of the many choices.

"Go ahead, you crazy old man," I said.

"What?" he asked.

“I told you to try, you crazy old man. Kill me if you can.”

“How dare you!” the old man yelled again.

“Lee Seol-Ho! Are you disobeying me?!” Lee Sang-Hee yelled.

I was in the middle of an unexplainable situation, but I enunciated each of my words.

“You crazy old man…”

“You bastard!”

“If I die, do you think my Hee-Ra noona will just sit by and do nothing?!” I yelled.

I saw the old man close his mouth.

CHAPTER 45
CRAZY WOMAN (3)

"If I die, do you think my Hee-Ra noona will just sit by and do nothing?!" I yelled.

I saw the old man close his mouth.

Of course, he wouldn't believe in my lie and if Cha Hee-Ra was here, she would have already burst into laughter since it was only yesterday when we first met and we didn't really talk that much.

It was bullshit, but I was certain that it was going to work.

The old man's mind was probably thinking of a particular scene by now.

'There is. I'm sure there is.'

Whether it was intentional or not, Cha Hee-Ra and I had a connection.

I guess it was a provocative scene for an old man to watch because he lowered his head.

"That's… bullshit…" he said.

"I'm sure you'll find out whether it's really bullshit or not. You have eyes don't you?" I said.

"…"

He became very calm.

Despite me just shouting out nonsense, it was quite effective, so I guess the leader of the Red Mercenary Guild's name carried a lot of weight.

I just shouted her name out, Under the condition that Cha Hee-Ra and the Blue Guild didn't have any connection in the first place, but I guess my assumption was right.

Obviously, no one would want to get on the bad side of the monster whose strength was 97 points and it wasn't simply because of her stats either.

The Red Mercenary Guild was one of the biggest guilds within the Holy Empire and out of all the people that I have seen so far, she possessed the highest stats and combat ability. Assuming that Cha Hee-Ra acted based on her nature, they wouldn't bother figuring out whether what I said was true or a lie; they simply wouldn't act hastily after hearing her name.

Right now, the Blue Guild looked like a candle that was waiting for its light to be blown out by the wind.

'Naturally.'

A scared dog usually barked the loudest and it applied to both the old man and me.

"How do you know Cha Hee-Ra…"

"That's none of your business. Whether we knew each other since living on Earth or if we used to be lovers, that's not what's important. The important thing is that the Blue Guild, who has the negotiation rights, has intimidated the new recruits using force and that the people outside shouldn't know about this. I guess even the glorious Blue Guild will flinch after hearing Hee-Ra noona's name," I said.

"…"

"I don't know what's going on around here, but I'm sure you have enemies outside this room… and I'm sure you don't want to hand over the negotiation rights to another guild, so I don't understand why you're acting like this. I came here to negotiate, not to fight. Even if your head is filled with your days of glory, don't you think it's a problem if you're ignoring your superior and acting this way? Or are you so bad at judging the situation that you're unable to recognize the problem?" I asked.

"You bastard…"

Almost as if it was a habit, I couldn't stop grinning because the moment Cha Hee-Ra's name was mentioned, the magic that filled this place thinned out. However, I spoke while maintaining my serious expression.

It was important to calm down because in a meaningless argument, the side that

showed an excessive amount of rage was the losing side.

“Whew… if your plan was to show that the Blue Guild has a liberal and shitty environment that's almost like a family atmosphere, then it was a big success, actually no…… I want to tell you that it was a great success… I wanted to tell you that it was a great success,” I explained. “…”

“It’s people like you that ruin a group,” I commented.

“What?” the old man asked.

“Stagnant water,” I said.

“Stop talking bullshit when you don’t even know anything…” he said.

“I don’t have to see it to know what’s going on. Mr. Lee Seol-Ho. It doesn’t really matter how you evaluate me and I know very well that Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung ha-Yan are the *valuable* members here. Yes, of course, I fully understand,” I explained.

“…”

“But you shouldn’t have overreacted. Even if this continent is run based on the logic of power, your actions were very rude. I’m not your subordinate yet,” I told him.

“You bastard!”

The moment the old man tried to get up.

Boom!

The sound caused me to turn my head and Lee Seol-Ho, who was filled with anger, also looked towards the source of the sound.

It was obvious what had happened. Lee Sang-Hee slammed her fist on the desk because she didn’t want to hear her subordinate’s bullshit anymore.

“Lee Seol-Ho,” she called out.

“Miss Lee-Lee Sang-Hee…” he answered.

“Do you have any idea how you’re acting right now?” she asked.

“That’s…”

“You’re on probation,” she said.

“Excuse me?”

“I said you’re on probation as of this moment. You can leave and return to the guild after you apologize to Mr. Ki-Young,” she ordered.

I somewhat knew that this was going to happen.

As the person that was the central figure of the guild, there was only one thing she needed to do for the condescending people that were still stuck during their days of glory.

“It was… for the guild…” the old man said.

“I told you to apologize. I won’t repeat myself, Mr. Lee Seol-Ho,” Lee Sang-Hee said.

He would probably lower his head because people like him were usually weak against strong people.

As expected, I saw a frown on the old man’s face. As if he felt betrayed and didn't understand what happened, he had a complicated look on his face, but whether he understood the situation or not was none of my concern.

I noticed Lee Seol-Ho slowly looking towards me and of course, I saw him bowing as well. “I apologize… for… my… rude speech,” he said.

“I accept and I also overreacted. My apologies,” I said.

“Thank you for your understanding,” he said.

Lee Seol-Ho didn’t seem apologetic and the way he ran outside was a sight to see.

His slightly complicated expression made me feel a bit anxious, but I couldn’t show it, so when I looked at Lee Sang-He with a bright smile, I saw her bow as well.

“I’m really sorry. It was because of my carelessness that I wasn’t able to control the guild members properly. I’m… really sorry,” she said.

“…”

‘She’s virtuous.’

Lee Sang-Hee was a virtuous person. She wasn’t acting this way just to look good.

It was to the point that I lowered my head out of embarrassment and obviously, there was no reason for me to become enemies with the Blue Guild.

Nothing was going to come out of it even if I pressured her more, so even though it was unfortunate, I believed that it was a reasonable decision to stop here.

“It’s fine, I’m actually sorry about what happened,” I told her.

“Even if you criticize us, I have nothing to say, but… please…” she said.

“If it’s regarding the contract issue, you don’t have to worry.”

“Sorry?” she asked.

“I was disrespectful,” I answered.

“Oh…”

“I don’t think he really thought about the guild members' pride and blabbed on. He said it was for the negotiation, but he shouldn’t say things that will hurt the guild’s image. I can’t justify Mr. Lee Seol-Ho’s actions, but I can’t say that I was right either,” I explained.

“Oh… do you know Miss Cha Hee-Ra…”

“I was lucky enough to make a small connection with her. I think it’ll help the Blue Guild if I maintain a good relationship with her,” I said.

“Does that mean… I can consider that as you agreeing to the contract?” Lee Sang-Hee asked.

“Of course. I’ll agree to the down payment of 10,000 gold instead of 15,000 gold, however…” I started.

“Go on.”

“I hope you can consider giving us an executive position within the Blue Guild,” I said.

“Oh…”

“I’m sure you understand why I’m making this kind of request.”

There was no guarantee that the situation just now wasn’t going to happen again and there was also no guarantee that he was the only old man with this kind of mindset within the guild. He may unite people and try to fuck us over because that was how vested rights usually worked.

I wasn’t planning on letting him walk all over me and if he wanted to have a political fight, I would welcome it with open arms.

I hinted at what kind of power I needed in order to create that foundation.

“It doesn’t matter if it’s just a rank,” I told her.

She would probably accept my suggestion because she was judging that my value had increased compared to before. But the biggest reason was that I had a connection with Cha Hee-Ra, the mercenary queen and if our party joined the Blue Guild, then the guild would have the possibility to work with the Red Mercenary Guild. Of course, all of this was a lie.

Lee Sang-Hee looked like she was considering the possibility of me being the Red Mercenary Guild’s spy, but I guess she eventually came to the conclusion that the guild had no reason to mess with the Blue Guild. In that case, joining hands was a profit that she wouldn’t be able to put a price on. Not only that but…

‘Stagnant water… ’

The force that kept the stagnant waters, who were gnawing the guild, may think that we were good enough. To Lee Sang-Hee, I was sure that the condescending members gave her quite a headache and after recalling the situation just now, this guild had a

lot of issues and they were different from power struggles.

The reason why I asked for an executive position wasn't only for me, but it was for her and the guild.

'I'll take care of it for you,' was basically what I was telling her. Of course, there was probably a difference in the result that she wanted and the result that I wanted, but when it came to purifying the stagnant water, I believed she wouldn't have a different opinion about it.

"Honestly…" she started.

"Yes?"

"For the down payment, we'll match it as much as we can, and regarding the executive position, it's not like I haven't thought about it at all, but… I can't help but be cautious because it seems like you're asking for a position that's a bit higher than what I am thinking. Am I right…" she asked carefully.

I didn't need to lie about it, so I nodded. "Yes, that's right."

"Not only that… for the epic ranked items, I would like to let you know ahead of time that it may be difficult for us to give them to you right now. It may be possible if you give us enough time, but right now…"

"Oh."

'It's rarer than I imagined.'

I guess epic-ranked items were more valuable than I thought. Maybe it was because Kim Hyun-Sung nonchalantly pulled out Ramus Tucker's Introduction to Alchemy, but I had slightly underestimated the rarity of high-tiered items.

"You don't have to provide the items right away if it's an item that we can't use right away…" I told her.

"Oh! Then would it be okay if I tell you more about this after we hold an internal meeting? It won't take long," Lee Sang-Hee requested.

"Of course. I know it's not an easy decision, so you can take your time thinking about

it," I replied.

"Thank you for being considerate," she said.

I was sure that it wasn't a meeting about whether to accept us or not since that was already a given. I was sure that they were going to discuss which items they were going to give and what kind of rank they were going to give me. I wanted to listen to their meeting, but unfortunately, I didn't have the time nor the luxury to do that.

"I'll take my leave now," I said.

"Okay, thank you Mr. Ki-Young and I'm sorry again for the rudeness earlier," she said.

"It's fine, I should be the one apologizing," I told her.

It was because I had to change the bullshit I said earlier into reality.

'Cha Hee-Ra… '

Just like the gramps said I underestimated this place.

No one knew what kind of things could occur within this continent. The talented Kim Hyun-Sung could suddenly get killed and the crazy old man could be making plans to target me later.

The reality was that it was too dangerous to move forward just by trusting our party alone.

'We need support.'

I thought it was time that we needed support to prepare us for an unexpected situation.

CHAPTER 46
THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE MICE WILL PLAY WHEN THE CAT IS PRESENT (1)

If it was just me, then I would've joined the Red Mercenary Guild, no, at the very least, I wouldn't have joined the Blue Guild. In my eyes, the Blue Guild was a guild that was already falling apart and with the combination of rotten and stagnant water, it was appropriate to say that the guild was flooded with shit water.

If I were to decide by only thinking about the present, choosing the Blue Guild was unreasonable since it felt like the guild master may have already died somewhere. Lee Sang-Hee, the sub guild master, was the only person that had been showing her face around us and the old gramps that were still living in their days of glory were eating the guild away, making it easy for the other guilds to neglect them.

Lee Sang-Hee was the only normal person here and deciding to join this guild was no different from getting on a sinking boat, but if I joined the Red Mercenary Guild's boat, then I would be extremely delighted for sure as I could watch the guild sink while laughing.

I wasn't overconfident in my stats, to begin with, and I didn't expect there to be any changes just because I joined the Blue Guild and I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung was also thinking of the same thing.

'Since our fox is surprisingly cautious.'

Despite that, Kim Hyun-Sung still wanted to join the Blue Guild and he had been like that since the beginning. Of course, it seemed like he did consider the other guilds, but up until this moment, the regressor believed that this was the right path.

I was able to come up with one conclusion and whether it was in the near future or the far future, joining the Blue Guild was more profitable than joining the Red Mercenary Guild.

There was no reason to buy a different lottery ticket just because the lottery ticket

that had a high chance of winning was difficult to get.

The regressor placed his bet on the side that had a bit more certainty.

If the guild threw out the blessing that landed on their hands just because a few old gramps felt uncomfortable, that would be a stupid thing to do.

Of course, it wasn't like there weren't any problems.

'My safety.'

My safety was the most important and as long as I didn't ruin the regressor's plan, making a plan for my safety was the reason why I was looking for Cha Hee-Ra. There may come a time when I would have to ruin Kim Hyun-Sung's plan for my safety but now wasn't the time.

'I can handle it.'

I can handle a senile old man and a dying guild.

"Are you talking about the Red Mercenary Guild?" Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

"I'll be right back," I said.

"Why are you suddenly…"

"I have something to discuss with the mercenary queen," I said, cutting him off.

"You're referring to… Cha Hee-Ra," he said and then I nodded.

Kim Hyun-Sung's expression looked ambiguous and just as I expected, there was a commotion on Park Deok-Gu and Jung Ha-Yan's side. For them to react that way was understandable because despite experiencing a difficult time during the incident that day, I told them that I was going to visit her. Jung Ha-Yan was openly expressing her anxiety and Park Deok-Gu was feeling awkward because of her. In Jung Ha-Yan's case, not only did her face turn pale, but she looked as if she was panicking.

"Oppa…" she called out.

"Hey, hyung-nim… you're… not trying to join that lady…"

“I’m not. It’s something that’ll help the party,” I said, interrupting Park Deok-Gu.

“But still… she’s a cunning woman…” he said.

“O-Oppa…” Jung Ha-yan called out.

To Jung Ha-Yan, I was sure that it was a bolt out of the blue because she was trying to pretend that nothing had happened between me and Cha Hee-Ra. When I suddenly told them that I was going to visit the Red Mercenary Guild, I was sure that this action of mine was something she never expected. I was honestly worried that she was going to cause trouble, but I thought that it would be fine for now since I was arranging my own safety gear for the future.

“Can I ask why?” Kim Hyun-Sung asked.

There was no reason for me to hide it.

“I thought we needed someone to watch our backs, but I’ll tell you the details once things work out,” I replied.

“Oh… I see.”

Kim Hyun-Sung’s reaction wasn’t bad. Since I was telling him that I was making a connection with her, I was sure that he welcomed the idea.

Jung Ha-Yan looked scared. She seemed to be thinking that I was going to abandon her, but of course, I wasn’t going to do that. She was moving her lips as if there was something she wanted to tell me. I wasn’t sure if she was choking up or she thought that interrupting my conversation with Kim Hyun-Sung was rude, but she didn’t interrupt us.

Park Deok-Gu also remained silent.

I had no choice but to lightly grab Jung Ha-Yan’s hands.

“I’m going to talk with her for a bit and come right back,” I told her.

“Okay,” she said.

Normally, Jung Ha-Yan’s face would turn red, but I guess she was shocked in many

ways after I saw her reaction. As I ignored Park Deok-Gu's unexpectedly pleased smile, I started walking down the hallway with Jung Ha-Yan and that was when I heard her quiet voice. "P-Please don't go."

"Nothing will happen," I told her.

"Still…"

"I'm just going to have a short conversation with her, so you don't have to worry," I said.

"I… want to… go too," she said.

"It'll be better if I go alone."

"Please… please don't go. If… If you go…"

Her voice became even quieter. I sort of expected this to happen, but when I felt an unknown chill, I couldn't help but feel a bit confused by the situation.

However, doing this was the most important, not only for the party but especially for me.

Jung Ha-Yan didn't have the ability to protect me right now.

I lightly pushed her against the wall and the small frown that was on her pale face was replaced with a shocked one.

"O-Oppa," she said.

I didn't say anything and instead, lifted her chin using my hand. Her face turned so red that it looked as if it was going to explode and it seemed like she couldn't pull herself together because of the sudden situation. Her quiet voice was now replaced with a voice that sounded nervous.

"Oppa… oppa…"

When I moved my face closer to hers, she looked at me as if she was trying to take in my entire face. I started feeling something soft on my lips. Even though it was a simple kiss with no romantic atmosphere, it seemed like it was working on Jung Ha-

Yan. After wrapping her arms around my head, our tongues started playing with each other. This wasn't part of the plan, but it didn't matter.

Jung Ha-Yan stuck to me desperately as if she was trying to disinfect the dirtiness from the incident that day.

My head started hurting because she grabbed my hair tightly, but because of the strangely exciting atmosphere, even that pain felt good.

"Ah…"

I was the one that initiated the kiss, but Jung Ha-Yan's body started trembling, which made it seem like she was trying to do more. As if she was trying to release the desire that she had been suppressing all this time, she was continuously biting and dragging this on, so pushing her away from me wasn't easy.

Once we were out of breath, our saliva stretched out and I finally got the opportunity to catch my breath, but Jung Ha-Yan lost her mind and opened her mouth as she wrapped her arms around my neck again.

"Oppa. Oppa. Oppa. Oppa."

She kissed me again and there wasn't a reason for me to avoid it because accepting her childish behavior was what was important right now.

I wasn't sure if it was intentional, but I felt my tongue sting. I realized that Jung Ha-Yan had bit my tongue. I slightly frowned, but it wasn't a problem. When Jung Ha-Yan looked at me with a surprised look, that was when I was able to slowly get her off of me.

"I like you."

I whispered sweet words to her and saw her body shaking with joy.

Yes, joy.

Her face was definitely showing joy.

"I… love… love you too," she said.

“I want to protect my lovely Ha-Yan,” I told her.

Only half of it was true.

“Me… me too…”

“I don’t want you to get hurt,” I said.

“Me too!” she yelled.

“That’s why I need to do this. Maintaining a good relationship with that woman is what we need since I’m not strong,” I explained.

“Because… I’m not strong…” she said.

“Right, because we’re not strong,” I said in agreement.

“Still… still…”

“It’ll be fine,” I told her.

I saw Jung Ha-Yan kept quiet with a complicated look on her face. I had an idea what she was thinking about. Of course, I didn’t bother interpreting it, but I lightly kissed her again after retracting my hand.

It was nothing.

Jung Ha-Yan must have been thinking that I was getting sold off against my will, but I was simply going there to talk.

But I thought that the current situation wasn’t that bad.

‘Good.’

I couldn’t trust an unpredictable woman. It was dangerous, but the person that would be able to protect me the best was right in front of me. Her face was filled with an unknown responsibility.

Starting today, Jung Ha-Yan was going to focus on her growth a bit more because she realized the fact that I had to rely on someone else since I was powerless.

While releasing large tears, this situation may seem like a documentary to her, but to me, it was a melodrama. I couldn't help but laugh because she was treating it as if it was a big deal when it really wasn't.

"What happened last time won't happen again," I told her reassuringly.

"*Hiccup…"*

"I love you," I said.

"Ah… Ahh…"

Even though I have never said these words before, seeing Jung Ha-Yan fall to the ground because she was weak in the knees and then seeing her body shake made me think that it wasn't a bad decision. After kissing her lips once more, I started walking slowly.

A part of my plan was ruined so I had no choice but to speed up my relationship with Jung Ha-Yan. Of course, I thought this was pretty good. I could have done it romantically in a nice setting, but this kind of crisis will strengthen our relationship a little bit more.

'Crazy old man.'

I lacked the power to eliminate the unexpected impurities. Little wit in the head made much work for the feet, however, it was also true vice-versa.

It only took a moment for me to leave the guild. After walking a short distance, I saw the location where the Red Mercenary Guild was staying. One of the guild members looked at me with a surprised expression and then quickly ran towards me.

"How can I help you?" they asked.

"I've come to meet Miss Cha Hee-Ra," I answered.

"Oh! Could you please wait a moment?" they asked.

"Of course," I said.

They seemed kind of excited.

Moments later, the same person nodded and continued the conversation from earlier.

“You may come inside. It’s the last room over there.”

“Got it,” I said.

I thought about what I should say to her, but I had no idea how I should clear up this situation.

Every step I took felt heavy because I was sure that Cha Hee-Ra wasn’t all that interested in me, Lee Ki-Young, personally. It would have been different if I came to tell her that I wanted to join the Red Mercenary Guild, but that wasn’t it.

When I knocked once, I heard a voice from inside the room.

“Come in,” she said.

“Okay.”

When I walked in after opening the door, I saw her yawning while lying on the bed. As always, she had her red hair and was wearing clothes that looked as if I would be able to see through them. Just like last time, I thought about where I should look, but I faced the powerful person in front of me without panicking.

“Did you change your mind?” she asked.

“No, I haven’t,” I answered.

“Then… you should start by explaining why you came here all by yourself… I was having a pleasant dream. To be honest, I’m a bit offended. I don’t really like men that just dip their toes into the water… and I’m sure you didn’t visit your noona just because you couldn’t forget about me when you already have such a wonderful girlfriend…”

I didn’t know how to start the conversation because I haven’t really figured out what kind of person Cha Hee-Ra was. Her vigor and valor personality confirmed that she didn’t feel intimidated or scared.

Since I came here to make a proposal, I needed to be confident in front of her.

After taking a deep breath, I spoke the words that were in my head.

“I would like for you to become my sponsor.”

There was silence within the room.

Cha Hee-Ra looked slightly surprised and then spoke while looking at me as if she was really excited. Her voice sounded slightly seductive.

“Hm… are you… good at it?” she asked.

‘What is she talking about… ’

CHAPTER 47
THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE MICE WILL PLAY WHEN THE CAT IS PRESENT (2)

'What is she talking about… '

Cha Hee-Ra looked like she was having a lot of fun. She looked curious, but more than that, it felt like she was smacking her lips.

"There hasn't been a person who dares to speak to me so bluntly… I guess you're confident. Honestly, I like your appearance, but… I like people that kind of look like a snake. I like your slightly slit eyes and if I were to be blunt about it, you're not good-looking, but you seem charming," she said.

"That's…"

"It's not that I don't have any desire to buy you at all, but I should at least test you out to see if you're useful… how about it?" she asked.

When Cha Hee-Ra crossed her leg and she patted the space next to her, I realized how she had taken my proposal. My face turned red in an instant.

'What… '

I thought that the word *sponsor* caused the misunderstanding, but she didn't seem like a stupid woman that wouldn't be able to understand what I said.

'Is she not taking this seriously?'

There was a good chance that she wasn't.

"That's not what I meant," I told her.

"Then what did you mean…

“That’s…”

“Lee Ki-Young. When I mentioned that I wanted to invest in you, that’s under the condition that you join our guild. Of course, your wonderful girlfriend needs to join as well. Honestly, even if you come by yourself, I’m willing to accept you even though your stats don't seem that great… I don’t think that badly about alchemists. I also think that maintaining a good relationship between us isn’t a bad idea either,” she explained.

“Oh.”

“However, it doesn’t make sense for you to continue receiving my support even after you transfer to a different guild because supporting you isn’t my job. It’s the job of the guild you’re affiliated with. Investing in a nobody? All I’m saying is that it’s more profitable for me to play with you a few times a month and give you money in return. Doing that is more profitable for us… understand?” Cha Hee-Ra explained.

‘Damn it.’

Her facts hit me really hard.

She was thinking that rather than investing in Lee Ki-Young’s personal growth, it was more profitable to invest in the time we would spend in bed. Of course, the fact that she thought of me that way wasn’t bad.

I wasn’t sure if she was acting or not, but she looked as if she wanted me right now. It felt like she simply discovered a fun toy rather than actually having feelings for me. Regardless of my pride, I didn’t want to nitpick about whether it was profitable for me to act like a puppy that listened to her well.

However…

‘I can’t do that.’

I couldn’t lower my value like that because she would end up getting tired of the toy she got and that wasn’t what I wanted.

“Of course I understand, Miss Cha Hee-Ra. I wasn’t asking you to personally sponsor me. I was asking you to become a sponsor of my party since we were the first one to complete the tutorial dungeon this round. I’m certain that both Kim Hyun-Sung and

Jung Ha-Yan will grow. They may even grow up to be one of the strongest players on the continent," I explained.

"So?" she asked.

"Sorry?" I asked.

"What about it? It doesn't matter to me whether they will grow or not because I'm already one of the strongest people. Our guild members are all talented people and even though I want the mage, I can hire a mage anytime as long as I throw some gold around. The Red Mercenary Guild has enough funding power that we can immediately hire the Devil's Guild or the mages of the mage tower. Even if Jung Ha-Yan grows, it'll take at least three years… is there a reason for me to sponsor you until then?" she asked.

"…"

"What I need are mages that are affiliated with the Red Mercenary Guild. I don't need what others have. If you're going to keep talking nonsense, just quietly come next to me and entertain me. I'll make sure to pay you handsomely and give you gifts from time to time," she said.

'Da… '

Telling me that she was going to give me money for sex was really shocking. No matter how I looked at it, it felt like she wasn't taking what I said seriously.

I slowly took out the artifact that I was holding to my chest. Cha Hee-Ra looked like she was curious and even though it was only for a moment, it caught her attention. Of course, she was curious because it was the same item that she gave me when we first met.

[Magic Pendant - Rare Rank]

[It's a pendant that increases one's magic by three points. It has the ability to amplify the magic's effect. The exact location of where it was found is unknown.]

“I don’t need an item like this,” I told her.

After looking at the pendant that landed right next to her bed, it only took her a moment to look at me with a flustered look. It seemed like she didn’t really understand the situation right now.

“You…” she started.

Maybe I went too far by throwing it on her bed, but I was able to have a serious conversation with her.

“It’s not even gold,” I said.

“…”

“What I need is your fame and power - the brand of Cha Hee-Ra the Mercenary Queen. I'm not interested in these things either,” I said.

“Do you even understand what you’re doing right now? Not hitting a rookie member is something that everyone implicitly agrees to, but acting this way won’t be beneficial for you. I guess you don’t know your place since you’re constantly receiving good offers…” she said.

“I know my place very well and I know that with one word, you can make me disappear right from this spot without a trace and I also know very well that I can get killed one day while walking and be abandoned in the middle of nowhere…” I told her.

“…”

“That’s why you… no, that’s the reason why I need you,” I said politely.

After carefully explaining, I looked at Cha Hee-Ra.

The room was filled with bloodthirstiness and magic. The pressure that I immediately felt couldn’t be compared to that senile old man.

“This is fun. I think I’m going to feel even more annoyed because you’re intentionally acting this way. I understand what you’re thinking and saying. I know it was only for a moment, but I’m sure you’ve noticed my personality, so that makes it exciting… to

be honest, you're really my type. There aren't that many men who are able to act confidently in front of me… I don't know how long it has been since I received this kind of treatment. And from a rookie that recently arrived here…" she said.

"…"

"But you do realize that your actions are a bit too much, right? You know. Alchemists are originally said to be practitioners of equivalent exchange. If you're going to use me as your meat shield, then I can assume that you're going to prepare a reward worthy of that, right? If you don't, then you're going to have to take responsibility for your actions," she said.

It was difficult to talk, but I didn't think of this as a failure because I created an opportunity to talk with her.

"Talk," she ordered.

"First… it's regarding the shares of the potion that I'm going to create in the future," I started.

With my trembling hands, I took out the epic-ranked book from my pocket and threw it on the ground. Her look of interest only lasted for a moment.

"It sounds like you're saying that you're going to become that amazing… I don't know where you managed to get this epic ranked book, but if this all then you're going to become a bit exhausted," she said.

"One percent… that's how much I'll give you," I said.

"That's it?"

"You're going to be sitting on a pile of money," I told her.

It was a pure bluff and lie, but my voice may sound trustworthy to her.

Why?

Because I was putting my life on the line.

"Second… having a friendly relationship with my party."

“I told you earlier, but I don’t have any interest in things that aren’t mine,” she said.

“We’re going to grow beyond your imagination,” I said.

“You deceiving bastard,” Cha Hee-Ra commented.

“I’m not joking. We’re going to become stronger and will become the guild that represents this empire. With the Red Mercenary Guild as a close alliance, we’ll always be by your side. It’s not that big of an investment, but you’ll be able to establish a good relationship with us before any guild and power,” I told her.

“You do realize that what you’re saying is a bunch of bullshit that people say with no regard to how the other person is feeling, right? Even if there’s no cost in the investment, there’s no guarantee that you’ll succeed in making the potions or that your party is going to grow,” she explained.

“Third.”

“…”

“I’ll give you the mage that you need.”

“Bullshit,” she said.

“Out of the people that came out after completing this tutorial, within three years, no two years, I’ll select people who can efficiently use magic. I’ll create a chart and give you the list of names,” I explained.

I saw her staying quiet with her mouth closed.

If the Red Mercenary Guild’s project had just started, then I was sure that my proposal was exceptionally tempting to her.

“It’s exciting, but… is it possible?” she asked.

“My first reason as to why I’m confident is because I’m going to have an executive position within the Blue Guild, who has the first negotiation rights.”

“Hm…”

“My second reason is…”

“…”

“It’s a secret,” I said.

“You…”

“You said that alchemists are originally said to be practitioners of equivalent exchange,” I told her.

The fact that I was able to find those with talent was a secret and although her protection was important, it would put me at a disadvantage if I revealed everything.

Cha Hee-Ra remained quiet. I was certain that she was thinking that my secret and her protection wasn’t an equivalent exchange. I was hoping that she would release a hearty laugh like the characters that appeared in cartoons so that I can wrap this up, however, I didn’t think that it was going to happen. I noticed her in deep thoughts with a very serious expression, so I guess that she was calculating the profit and loss.

‘Damn it.’

Cha Hee-Ra may be trying to guess what my secret was. The certainty that my party was going to grow and finding mages that had the potential to grow. It may not be perfect, but she might have come to somewhat of a conclusion.

‘Did I say too much?’

When I bit my lips…

“Regarding the shares of the potion, I want three percent instead of one percent and regarding the list of mages, I also want a list of people with close-range jobs. And I’ll decide on the method,” she said.

“What…”

“Didn’t you need my protection? No one will be able to touch you and in exchange, I’ll decide on the method,” Cha Hee-Ra said.

“How…”

“You’ll find out at some point today. So, are you going to do it or not?” she asked.

Of course, there wasn’t a reason for me to reject it.

“I look forward to working with you,” I said.

“Let’s talk more about this next time…” she suggested.

As if she was telling me that I should leave, Cha Hee-Ra waved her hand. She looked quite pleased and I realized that she was satisfied with my proposal.

‘It’s done.’

When I turned around and left her room, I saw a group of people running towards her room. They all looked like they had close-range jobs, so when I used Mind’s Eye and looked at them, I noticed that all of them were executives of the Red Mercenary Guild. I was assuming that they were trying to have a meeting regarding the conversation she and I had earlier. I was sure that they were going to ask her opinion about my proposal and about protecting me. The problem was how Cha Hee-Ra was going to protect me.

The moment I exited the Red Mercenary Guild happily, a message suddenly appeared in my status window and I discovered what she thought about me.

[You’ve obtained a title.]

“What?”

[Title - Mercenary Queen’s Lover]

“Damn it.”

This was the first title that I obtained after arriving on this continent.

CHAPTER 48
POWER (1)

The negotiation with the Blue Guild went well. When we opened our account, the down payment was transferred in real-time. Although we haven't received our epic-ranked items yet, we were given positions that we didn't deserve. We were provided exactly what was promised.

Honestly, I did debate whether I should join the Blue Guild up until the last moment, but the more I knew about them, the more I thought that they weren't such a bad guild. For the Red Mercenary Guild, the guild master had the authority, but for the Blue Guild, their organizational system was divided more than I expected. There was the guild master, sub guild master, six teams under them, and a few administrative positions. To make it simple, the Blue Guild was made up of six parties. A party had a minimum of five people and 15 people at most.

I didn't know what the organizational system of the other guilds was like, but I was starting to understand why Kim Hyun-Sung liked the Blue Guild so much.

'It's nice to move together.'

As he expected, the moment we joined, a new party was created within the guild and the leader of the seventh party was Kim Hyun-Sung. It was difficult to say that we were now official members of the guild, but I was sure that we would be able to fit in with the guild pretty soon.

The things that had been mentioned until now were things that the Blue Guild originally agreed to do for us. All that was left were the epic-ranked items that we hadn't received yet and the position that would be given to me. They were probably thinking hard about where I should be placed because they had to prepare a position where I wouldn't be looked down upon by old men like Lee Seol-Ho. Not long after, they prepared a position for me.

'Special administrator of non-combatant jobs.'

Anyone would be able to tell that it was a vague and improvised job. I originally had

a party, so for someone like me to have an administrative job was rare, but Lee Sang-Hee was being considerate by providing me with a foundation where I could grow with Kim Hyun-Sung's party.

'Nice.'

Anyways, because of me, the Blue Guild took on one more administrative position and no one knew what kind of job was assigned to me. I was sure that they wanted to ask me for help with the administrative work, but it was difficult for them to give me a task right now. Despite that, the fact that they gave me a position in such a hurry meant that there was something that they wanted from me.

That was because…

"Mr. Ki-Young, a gift arrived for you outside," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Oh, thank you Mr. Hyun-Sung."

…I was the mercenary queen's lover.

'Damn… '

When Cha Hee-Ra said that she was going to do things her way, I was worried. But I didn't expect that she would do something like this. I thought that maybe she wanted to do an act of small revenge on me for my arrogant attitude, but considering the fact that she handwrote a letter for me every day and sent valuable gifts, I guess she thought that doing a proper investment would be better.

Of course, I got what I wanted and there wasn't anyone within the Benigoa Holy Empire that would be crazy enough to mess with the mercenary queen's lover.

'Still… '

"This isn't right."

Her method was a bit different from the method that I had in mind.

Unlike me, who was upset, the Blue Guild became successful. Currently, the Red Mercenary Guild was the strongest guild within the Holy Empire, but the Blue Guild was rapidly rising up the ranks. Of course, I was in the center of all of this, so it felt

like my position within the guild had gone up accordingly. However, the fact that some people were looking at me negatively couldn't be helped.

'Cha Hee-Ra, the mercenary queen of the Red Mercenary Guild, has fallen deeply in love with the rookie that just came out of the tutorial. That rookie has an executive position within the Blue Guild and is constantly being courted by the mercenary queen.'

This was the rumor that caused it, but there were other rumors about me, like how I was a bastard that still did shady things despite having a hidden lover, or that I was extremely skilled in bed, or that I had already been familiar with Cha Hee-Ra back on Earth.

Of course, the Red Mercenary Guild was the one that started these rumors. The rumors had already spread within the limited space in front of the tutorial dungeon, so I was sure that it would eventually spread to the Holy Empire.

'Damn it… '

While looking at the gifts that had piled up, Kim Hyun-Sung carefully spoke to me. I was sure that he felt confused and shocked by it because his opinion about Cha Hee-Ra was different from what he was seeing at the moment.

"Can you tell me what kind of conversation you had with her?"

"It wasn't anything important, but I asked her to be our sponsor. I'm not sure why she's doing this, but I'm sure it's just a bad joke," I answered.

"Hm… possibly. But I think you left a good impression on her because of all the gifts she's been sending," he said.

After hearing what Kim Hyun-Sung said, when I looked at the goods that were stacked in front of the building, I couldn't help but come to a realization that this kind of misunderstanding also added trust.

[Ancient Republic's Potion Making Alchemy Kit - Epic Rank]

[This is an alchemy kit that has been passed down from the ancient republic. The basic equipment was discovered in an underground laboratory and even after a long

time, the equipment has maintained its original form. It may look like it is made out of a special chemical, but this equipment contains magic and because of its excellent quality and performance, it can't be considered a simple piece of equipment. It increases the success rate of potion making and will increase the user's luck stat temporarily.]

This wasn't all…

[Minotaur's Sinew - Rare Rank]

[Banshee's Magic Essence - Rare Rank]

[Troll's Blood - Rare Rank]

[Unknown Monster's Blood - Rare Rank]

[Holy Empire's Holy Water - Rare Rank]

Boxes of different types of catalysts often used in alchemy were stacked. There was a handwritten letter on top of the boxes and the words written were full of affection.

- Thank you always. It's not much, but I hope you'll accept my gifts. To my most handsome darling in the world, with love. Cha Hee-Ra.

'That… damn it… '

It was obvious, but of course, I liked it since she was handing out free gifts and expensive items. And honestly, I didn't care how other people looked at me.

The only problem was Jung Ha-Yan.

When this present first arrived and the rumors started spreading, I couldn't describe her expression with words. I was worried that she was going to use magic on the gifts that the mercenary queen gave me, but seeing how she was crying and trying not to look at the gifts, she was obviously stressed with the fact that there wasn't anything she could do for me. Jung Ha-Yan knew better than anyone that in her current state, she couldn't provide me with these kinds of gifts. Of course, I kept telling her that I didn't have that kind of relationship with Cha Hee-Ra and tried to convince her that she was the only person I loved, but Jung Ha-Yan spent a lot of time quietly thinking to herself. Jung Ha-Yan focused on her magic training like crazy, making it look like she was overworking herself.

Besides the short time that we spent together, I didn't think that she slept much and of course, this included the times where we showed our affection physically. If we didn't spend time together like this, I was sure that Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't be able to handle it. Those times were when we reconfirmed our feelings for each other, but it was also the times when she disinfected me from the dirty things.

"Where's Ha-Yan…" I asked.

"Miss Ha-Yan is probably at the lake in the back. I think she's been training herself in water magic recently. I'm sure you'll find her if you go there. Mr. Deok-Gu has been…" Kim Hyun-Sung answered.

"Deok-Gu?" I asked.

"I think Mr. Deok-Gu has been building a boat on the lake since this morning…" he said.

"A boat?"

"Yes. I think the way Miss Ha-Yan was staring at the lake gave him the impression that she wanted to ride a boat… I thought that it will help with her training, so I left them alone," he replied.

For some reason, I got chills on my back.

'Park Deok-Gu… '

I wasn't sure what he was planning right now, but I didn't have a good feeling about it. After gulping, I continued the conversation with Kim Hyun-Sung. "More than that,

is everything going well?"

"Yes, of course. The meetings are a bit difficult to follow right now, but… I think I know a bit more about the Blue Guild now. They said that tutorial dungeons have started opening up in other locations as well. It seems like the transfer market will open soon, but unfortunately, the guild doesn't have the luxury to invest in a conquest party… it'll probably be one or two people at most. I'm sure that there are people with a lot of potential within the survivors, so I think they're going to try to invest in those people," he explained.

"Hm… it's because of us," I said.

It was the perfect answer.

"You can say that, but if possible, I've been thinking about using the down payment for the members that'll be joining our party…" he said.

"I don't think it's a bad idea and I'm sure the guild itself will be kind of happy," I said.

"That's a relief. How are things on your side?" he asked.

"I think the key members of the guild are thinking about collaborating with other parties to enter a dungeon because helping us grow fast isn't that bad of an endeavor for the guild. It'll probably happen after this is done, but preparing in advance will be good," I explained.

"Which side…"

"That hasn't been decided yet. Personally, I think finding an undiscovered dungeon will probably give us experience, but I think the guild is thinking about going out on a basic hunt," I answered.

"Oh, I see," Kim Hyun-Sung said.

"Well, I have a meeting, so I'll head in first. What about you Mr. Ki-Young?" he asked.

"Oh, I'll be heading out first."

"Okay, then I'll see you in a few," he said.

It was a pretty helpful conversation.

When I glanced over at Kim Hyun-Sung, I saw him nod. If Kim Hyun-Sung thought about our course of action from now on and made plans based on that, then I could simply assist him with the external things. After all the tutorial dungeons were over, I could select and poach people from those that hadn't been chosen from the market, those that hadn't made a choice, and those that were done with their training.

Kim Hyun-Sung also looked at the survivors in order to find out if there was some sort of connection in the past, but it felt like he was just leaving it up to me. He realized that I did way better than he imagined. It was a short time, but since I provided results beyond his imagination, it was a bit funny seeing him think that his instincts were right.

'I need to be trusted more.'

It was better for people to think that I was useful in many things. I was sure that Kim Hyun-Sung was thinking that he had obtained a person that was useful.

As I walked, I headed towards the training center where the members were currently being trained. It was the place where the survivors from the tutorial dungeon were being taken care of.

Just like my conversation with Kim Hyun-Sung, the basic training had ended. Getting a headstart would put me at an advantage since I had to prepare for the recruitment drive. In addition, I also had to create a list of people for Cha Hee-Ra.

Of course, the people from the other tutorial dungeon were more important than these people, but there may be a survivor that I was not aware of, so I thought that it wouldn't be a bad idea to at least check.

"An executive member of the Blue Guild will be visiting us today. After completing this short, yet long training, you'll either receive offers from different guilds or you can either apply to them. I'd appreciate it if you'll act according to the procedure."

"Okay," the survivors answered.

Inside the tourney hall of the training center, today's training was in progress.

When I quietly moved, I could hear people greeting me first and they weren't from

the people that were lined up in the tourney hall.

“Keep up the good work,” I said.

“Oh! Thank you, team leader,” one person said.

“I haven’t been officially commissioned yet, sergeant,” I said.

“Haha, but you’ll soon be the pillar of the Blue Guild,” he said.

“I appreciate the compliment.”

“More than that, what brings you… there’s still some time left…” he asked.

“Oh, I thought it would be best to take a look ahead of time. Since I received a position that I’m not worthy of, I need to show that I’m at least doing my best,” I answered.

“As expected…”

The conversation only lasted for a moment, but I was sure that it was enough to reach the hearts of those that were under the hot sun.

The people who didn’t know me must’ve thought that a high-ranking person had arrived because their faces were filled with nervousness, but the people at the shelter with me had no idea what was going on.

‘Having power is nice.’

I saw people that couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

‘It all depends on whose side you’re on.’

We fell and came here together, but my position was more than 180 degrees different from theirs.

In a very extreme way.

CHAPTER 49
POWER (2)

I was in a situation where one side was an executive of a guild and the other side were survivors hoping that a guild or clan would recruit them. Honestly, I didn't feel all that bad because it felt like I finally confirmed that my decision wasn't wrong.

When I quietly looked around, I saw Lee Ji-Hye and the survivors from the shelter and their condition didn't look so bad. Considering the fact that they had been through difficult training, they seemed pretty healthy. Since they were products that were going to be sold at the market, the Blue Guild worked hard in managing them, and funny enough, it was to the point that their nutritional status seemed better than mine or Jung Ha-Yan's.

Considering how they had a hard time adapting at first, I thought that they had pretty much-accepted reality by now, and although it was difficult to believe, they realized that they had truly crossed over into this world.

"Uh…"

Even after excluding those that were at the shelter, I guess a lot of people survived because there were many faces that I didn't recognize. It didn't take long for me to use Mind Eye's and look through them. Magic stat above rare, below epic, above epic. As expected, no one caught my attention. I did see some with stats above rare, but I was sure that these people weren't the ones that Cha Hee-Ra wanted, but of course, I did check those that had decent talent as well.

Even if people were given the same ranks, it was best to put the above ranks on one side and the below ranks on the other, so I started splitting them up in my head.

"This must bring back memories," the instructor said.

"Yes," I answered.

The expression of the trainees and the instructor's attitude had put me in a really good mood. I also noticed that they were trying to leave a good impression because

they thought that it would be advantageous to them.

Out of the seven parties that were managing the Blue Guild, they were Tom, Dick, and Harry since they didn't belong to any of the parties. They seemed to have thought that if they left a good impression of me, they would be able to join the new party that was going to be created. Joining a party that the Blue Guild was officially supporting didn't simply mean an increase in salary. Not only would they receive a variety of benefits, but they would also be able to grow while receiving support from the guild.

This instructor, for example, joined as an ordinary guild member and tried to join the parties within the guild, but he wasn't selected by any of them. He probably took care of small tasks or volunteered to do the guild's small errands. In the end, he ended up where he was right now.

The Blue Guild invested in people that had the potential to grow. There might be people who would think that the reason why they were not able to grow thus far was that no one had invested in them. But this was a fallacy since if one truly had outstanding talent, then any party would want to take them.

When I looked at the instructor with Mind Eye's, I noticed that there was a limit to his growth.

'Even the stats… they're low overall.'

"Hahahaha."

"It hasn't been that long since I've been here so… I'm curious as to how the survivors are trained around here," I said.

"I see, then I'll explain to the best of my abilities. To be honest, they only receive basic training," he started.

"I see."

"First, it's our goal to help the survivors here obtain their jobs, but only a small portion of the group will obtain jobs without heading out. Only a small group of people will obtain jobs just by training and without hunting, so out of the talented people, there are many that have obtained their jobs this way," he said.

It was the same for Jung Ha-Yan.

“I see.”

“For the people that survived without having any kind of combat experience, it’s difficult for them to find their natural ability, so they will receive different types of training at once. For mages and priests, we do tests to see whether they’re able to feel their mana, so they usually fall into the close-range jobs. Anyways, the trainees learn many different things other than those. They learn basic combat training, units of money and those that we believe aren’t able to fight will join the non-combatant group and receive their job training separately,” he explained.

“When you say job training…”

“Like cleaning, cooking, chores, etc. Some people get hired at the restaurant that’s managed by the empire or by a blacksmith and there are others that use the talent they had back on Earth to get a job in the service industry, like a beauty salon.”

“Oh…”

“The reactions of those that had received an investment from the guild to start their own business wasn’t that bad. Even Miss Cha Hee-Ra of the Red Mercenary Guild hired a hairdresser specifically for the guild,” he said.

“Ahhh, yes, I’m aware,” I said.

Of course, this was my first time hearing it. Cha Hee-Ra seemed like she was taking care of her appearance, but it was more than I expected. Since she was a woman, it was only natural for her to do that, but for some reason, I couldn’t imagine Cha Hee-Ra receiving hair treatments.

“Then, for the people that join the non-combatant group…”

“We usually respect their decisions, but it’s something that’s not recommended at the training center. The results aren’t that good if they’re driven out to the continent without any foundation. We do provide a small amount of gold, but it’s not enough for them to settle down… the majority of people here want to be contacted by a guild or a clan. Even though we’re in danger no matter where we go, but… in situations like this, humans prefer to be affiliated with a group,” he said.

“Hm… I see.”

“Yes, and the majority of people want to join a mid-sized or a large guild, but… guilds that are already doing well usually don’t want to invest in rookies. They want rookies that aren’t like rookies… hm… for example, they want people like you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

I had heard this from somewhere.

‘A rookie that’s not like a rookie or a rookie that has experience.’

“What are the small clans like?” I asked.

“I’m not sure what to tell you, but the small clans are in a more hopeless situation. People that aren’t contacted by large or mid-sized guilds usually join a small clan, but… the survival rate of those people isn’t that high,” he answered.

“That’s interesting. Is there a reason why?” I asked.

“The first reason is that compared to a large guild, they don’t have resources to spare, so they overdo it by going on expeditions. It may be different for each guild, but like how there’s a black corporation on Earth, there are a lot of clans here that are like that. Accidents caused by excessive subcontracts by large guilds are common… and there are a lot of clan masters that would either exploit their guild members or don’t consider their safety because they want to bring in results… most people die without basic insurance and only receive passion pay,” the instructor explained.

“I understand what you’re saying.”

Honestly, I didn’t think that there was a need for me to listen anymore because I had an idea of how this continent was being managed. It seemed that the only thing that changed was the environment.

It was difficult for me to point out exactly what it was, but it felt like I was looking at the perfect miniature version of modern society. Large guilds were the reason for everyone’s envy and the small clans overworked their guild members too much. There was probably a difference in pay.

After the people with vested interests settled down here first, they succeeded in

gifting a hellish environment for the rookies.

The interesting thing was that the ratio of people joining the production or service job wasn't that low. I was sure that they had no choice though, but I thought that it was necessary to check in on the non-combatant members because there could be people that were idly selling bread because they hadn't realized their talent just yet.

"We also provide training about the general knowledge of the continent. Guilds, relationship with guilds, the relationship between the Holy Empire, the Republics and the Union of Kingdoms as well as the history," he said.

"That's something that we haven't properly learned either," I said.

"For you, the guild itself will provide you with the training and also for the trainees. Even when the remaining survivors join a different guild or clan, each guild still provides their own training. You can consider that to be the start since each of the guilds have their own training period and they will help the rookies grow based on their preference," he said.

"Ohhh."

"The Blue Guild is pretty free compared to others. The other guilds are kind of picky."

"I see, thank you for the information," I said.

"It was nothing. I'm really happy that I was able to help," the instructor said.

I lightly patted his shoulder and it might make me seem a bit arrogant, but his mouth naturally opened.

"I'll be sure to pay you back for the information you provided today," I told him.

"T-There's no need…"

"No, thank you very much," I said, cutting him off.

In cases like this, commoners who lived a rough life knew the best when it came to information like this.

When I turned my attention away from the happy instructor, I looked around again

and I saw Lee Ji-Hye looking at me strangely.

'Should I bring her?'

Of course I didn't mean to bring her to the party because I was sure that I was going to be busy for the time being. I had to create a list of names for Cha Hee-Ra and also recruit members for Kim Hyun-Sung's party. I didn't have the time to receive training from the Blue Guild. I also had to help out with the overall administrative work. Not only that but…

'Dungeon expedition, potion-making.'

I had to help with the dungeon conquest that Kim Hyun-Sung was planning and create products to sell in the Holy Empire. I had so many tasks that even 10 copies of me wouldn't be enough, so I needed a team that could at least help me with my tasks. Since Lee Ji-Hye was a pretty smart woman, I felt like I could trust her with simple tasks.

"Hm…"

"Do you need something?" the instructor asked.

"No, I'm fine," I answered.

When I looked around again, I saw a familiar face entering the training center.

'Lee Sang-Hee.'

And Kim Hyun-Sung.

I didn't see that obnoxious old man Lee Seol-Ho. Since he was on probation, I was sure that he was resting his old body.

When I saw a few administrative team leaders, I lightly greeted them and then saw them lightly bowing their heads. Our ranks were pretty much the same, so I expected that kind of reaction, but the instructor that I was talking to and the guild members that were on stand-by quickly greeted them as well. Lee Sang-Hee, who was greeting each and every guild member, approached me and spoke. "You came before me."

"Yes, I did, Miss Lee Sang Hee," I said.

“I told Mr. Hyun-Sung this before, but if you need people, I’ll approve the recruitment. After I figure out whether the guild can provide assistance, I’ll do my best to help,” she said.

“Thank you.”

I saw Lee Sang-Hee smiling quietly.

‘I’ll do my best.’

I felt like my energy was being drained because I was surrounded by unusual people, but when I was with Lee Sang-Hee, I felt relieved. This probably wasn’t something that I shouldn’t be saying to a 33-year-old woman, but she was like my mother because she gave off that comforting feeling.

“Thank you very much for always working hard,” she said.

“No, I should be the one thanking you,” I said.

After the light greeting, they took a seat at a suitable location, causing the trainees to feel nervous. I was sure that they were thinking about whether they were going to get an offer or not because the people that were in front of them were the big shots of the Blue Guild.

There wasn’t any great pretentiousness and even though I wasn’t expecting them to salute a flag or something, the ceremony was extremely simple.

After the Blue Guild’s sub guild master got on the podium, she spoke. “Thank you all for your hard work. I know you experienced hardship after being dragged here without knowing anything, but thank you for enduring it well even though it had only been a short time.”

“…”

“If I could, I would like to train all of you for a little longer until you settle down on the continent, but due to various reasons, we’re unable to do that and I would like to apologize for it. Soon, you’ll be leaving this place and will be heading towards the Benigoa Holy Empire. After today… some of you may get contacted by a guild or a clan and some of you may gather together and create a clan yourself.”

"…"

"If not those, then some of you will settle down in the Holy Empire as a non-combatant. Everyone has different ways of living, but there's one thing I would like to say to you all."

The atmosphere in the hall became strange.

"Please survive."

It felt like it applied to me too.

"The Blue Guild has a guild house in the southern region of Lindel, a free city and we'll always be waiting there for your applications."

After lowering her head for a moment, she immediately started walking away, which caught me off guard.

'Not even one… '

The Blue Guild wasn't planning on recruiting any of the survivors that were there and I was sure that the other guilds had similar thoughts. They believed that it wasn't worth using the guild's money and manpower to help them grow.

'How cruel… '

This place was like everywhere else. People here were also intertwined through common interests.

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